SHORT STORIES

VALENTINE NUMBER

He handed her the fateful valentine - the death - warrant of her happiness!

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No. 788.
PRICE ONE PENNY.

(A Dramatic Episode from the Story, "A Fateful Valentine." See inside.)

Week Ending
February 13, 1904.

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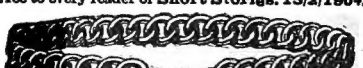

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SHORT STORIES

No. 789.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending February 13th, 1904.

A FATEFUL VALENTINE.

Telling of the Havoc it Wrought.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

PROBABLY no girl in the world was happier, on a certain fourteenth of February, some years ago, before the postman came, than Moyna Westwood. Indeed, she had everything in the world that could make a girl happy. Health, competence, a brave and true lover, and beauty into the bargain; youth, too, that most precious possession, the real value of which we do not know until we lose it, was hers.

Certainly no girl ever looked forward with brighter eyes and a gladder heart to the coming of the postman that morning than Moyna, and yet his coming was to bring her, though she knew it not, a year of pain and sorrow and tears, and the greatest shadow that had ever fallen upon her young, bright life. And this is the story of it all.

Moyna Westwood had been engaged, on this St. Valentine's morning, exactly three months. Her lover, Frank Tressilyan, adored her; and she was, or at least, counted herself as, the luckiest of girls in having won the love of so good and true a man. There had even been talk of an early wedding, somewhere about June or July, although Mrs. Westwood had looked somewhat askance at the choice of so early a date. But she loved her only girl, and she was very fond of Moyna's lover, and I think, but for this terrible Valentine's day, she would have given in to him, when he protested against her objections, with a very good grace indeed. But—that fateful valentine came between.

When Moyna Westwood heard the postman's knock, she ran to the door with a bright colour on her pretty face. The postman was upon the step and he handed her the fateful valentine that was the death-warrant of her happiness. No others were for her. Who else would send her valentines, now that she belonged to Frank; and this one, too, was in Frank's handwriting.

She did not open it at once. She crept away to her own room to put her lips to it, ever so tenderly, and to breathe her lover's name over it, with many a sweet and loving prefix, be assured. Then she opened the envelope. It seemed strangely thin.

A portrait and a letter fell out. Moyna Westwood picked them up with a strange tremor in her heart. She saw at a glance the letter was not in her lover's handwriting; but the photograph? It was that of her lover, standing beside a most handsome woman, who was looking up into his face with ardent admiration.

Moyna Westwood clutched at the rail of the bedstead to support herself, and looked again and yet again at the picture.

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For the moment she had forgotten the letter, which had fallen on the floor. Yes, without a doubt it was Frank Tressilyan. But who was the woman beside him?

And where was the valentine Moyna Westwood had expected from him that very morning? Was this it? If so, it seemed to her more like a cruel practical joke. But Frank would never play such a foolish, unkind trick upon her, Moyna Westwood knew. And yet it was—the address—in his own handwriting, and it was the only letter that the postman had handed her, upon the steps, that morning!

It was some time before Moyna Westwood could recover herself sufficiently to remember the letter that had fallen at her feet. Mechanically, as if in a dream, she at length stooped and picked it up. It was but brief, and in an unknown handwriting, plainly that of a woman:

"*This will considerably undeceive you as to Mr. Frank Tressilyan's honour and truth, if I mistake not. The woman who is photographed with him is his wife. If you doubt this, call at 140 Guilford Street, W.C., and you shall be shown their marriage certificate.*" "MARGARET TRESSILYAN."

Truly a fateful valentine for Moyna Westwood to receive. She stared at it amazed for some time, scarcely comprehending it. Then she thrust both letter and photograph into the envelope, not without a shudder, and put on her hat and jacket. She would go and see this woman who signed herself Margaret Tressilyan, and sift the matter to the very core. She could not cry—her sense of pride forbade that, as yet; she did not doubt her lover, and yet—the proofs of his unfaithfulness were so plain, so absolute.

The cup of happiness had been dashed from her lips in one miserable moment. The whole world had suddenly gone grey and blank for her.

When dressed, she went out and, hailing a hansom, drove straight to Guilford Street. It seemed a long journey, but Moyna Westwood was feverishly anxious to know the truth of the extraordinary story conveyed by the letter and the photograph. On the way, she looked again at the latter. It was without a doubt Frank Tressilyan's and the woman—well, to Moyna Westwood, she looked coarse and uneducated—an adventuress. She put the picture back into the envelope with something akin to a shudder. Its very touch seemed to soil her glove.

At last she reached Guilford Street, and, having dismisse

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the cab, rang the bell of No. 140, asking for Mrs. Tressilyan. She was ushered into a showily-furnished drawing-room. A moment later a handsome woman of thirty swept into the room, with a smile almost approaching triumph upon her face.

"You are Miss Westwood, of course?" she said.

"I am," answered Moyna with dignity.

"And you have come——?"

"I have come for an explanation of this!" Moyna held out the letter—her valentine.

"Oh!" with an unpleasant laugh—"that is very easily explained. Has not Frank told you his version?"

"I require yours first," said Moyna calmly, though she was feeling far from calm.

"Well, I didn't like to see you being made a fool of any longer, so I told him if he didn't tell you the truth, I would."

"If he didn't tell me?"

"Yes. I wrote the letter; he—Frank, my husband—addressed the envelope. Look for yourself and see."

Moyna Westwood suddenly turned sick at heart. But she strove with all her might not to show it. She dared not let this woman see she was wounded to the heart.

"I did not come here to cross-examine you," she said, after a pause; "be good enough to show me the certificate, and I will go!"

"Certainly!" retorted Margaret Tressilyan, with a gleam of vindictive light in her dark eyes. "I think you ought to thank me for my timely warning."

"That is enough. Show me your proof."

The woman took from her bosom a folded paper and laid it upon the table.

"There it is!" she exclaimed.

It was a marriage certificate, and bore the names of Margaret Vane and Francis Tressilyan. One glance sufficed for Moyna Westwood to see this. She felt that she went white to the lips, so cruel a blow was this that Fate had dealt her.

"Thank you," was all she could say.

"You are satisfied? The date was about seven years ago, the place New York."

Moyna remembered that Frank had told her he had been to America.

"Thank you," she repeated. The other woman watched her narrowly, with an evil gleam in her eyes. But Moyna Westwood was too proud to show her pain. She bowed coldly as Margaret Tressilyan rang the bell for the maid to show her out, and went away without a word.

The other woman watched her hail a hansom and drive away, from the window.

"It went home," she said triumphantly, "though she would not show it. Master Frank, that letter will prove a spoke in your wheel. I have owed you vengeance for a long time, and it looks as though I were going to pay the debt at last!"

Not until Moyna Westwood had reached home and was safely locked in her own room did she suffer herself to give way. Then the strain of the morning broke her down utterly, and she lay on her bed and wept the bitterest tears her eyes had ever shed. See him? No, never again! No explanation on his part could possibly explain away that proof that had been shown to her of his perfidy. But she would write to him.

She took off her engagement ring, and sent it back to him with a few curt words of farewell. She told her mother that her engagement was broken off, and Mrs. Westwood, seeing that she was very upset, made little or no comment, though she secretly wondered at the suddenness of the rupture and the cause of it. And then Moyna Westwood began to try to forget her lover and his faithlessness. She went out into Society, and was the gayest of the gay, except when alone. Her mother was alternately puzzled and suspicious. But knowing her daughter's pride and selfwill, she was afraid to interfere.

'Have you heard the news about Mr. Tressilyan?" remarked a mutual friend about a month later; "he has lost a lot of money and is going abroad—has gone, I hear."

Mrs. Westwood repeated this casually to her daughter, who had not been present when the remark was made, and it only elicited from Moyna a cool "indeed!"

But when alone she thought bitterly of it.

"He has had to settle the money on her," she thought, "and has gone abroad lest I should meet him." Which was a hundred thousand miles from the truth, had she only known it. But there are times when the truth is the last thing that comes to light.

While Frank Tressilyan was on the open ocean, and, later on, was trying to forget in the wilds of the States, Moyna Westwood was rapidly acquiring the reputation of a coquette. She threw herself madly into any excitement, any enjoyment that would prevent her from thinking. She gave so much apparent encouragement to two of her old lovers, that they both proposed to her, but were mortified by being unceremoniously rejected. But her gaiety was feverish, all on the surface.

At last an old family friend took her to task one day. They happened to be alone that particular afternoon, and Mrs. Vincent, who had known Moyna Westwood from babyhood, did what she had been longing and intending to do for ever so long, and spoke out boldly:

"My dear, what is wrong with you?"

Moyna looked at her in affected surprise.

"My dear Moyna, you cannot deceive an old woman like me. What does all this mean? Tell me the truth. For the last three or four months you have not been Moyna Westwood, but somebody else. Now, I am too fond of you to let you go on in this way. Tell me the truth."

Moyna Westwood broke into a flood of bitter tears, and Mrs. Vincent's arms were round her in a moment. In that motherly refuge, Moyna sobbed out her story.

"It is wicked, it is wrong of me, but I care for him still!" she moaned.

Mrs. Vincent caressed and comforted her.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed; "I don't believe Frank Tressilyan capable of such baseness."

"But I saw the photograph and the marriage certificate."

"Why did you not see him and give him a chance of explaining?"

"How could I? And how could he ever explain? No. It is true. If it had not been true, he would have insisted upon seeing me."

Poor Mrs. Vincent was puzzled. Truly, it did look very black against Frank Tressilyan. He had called to say "Goodbye" before going away, but from motives of delicacy Mrs. Vincent had not spoken to him of his broken engagement. Now she felt that she almost wished she had.

"I am glad you have told me, dear. I am going to think over this problem of yours. Even now I don't believe Frank could be such a scoundrel—excuse me, but it is the only word, if it is true. But I won't believe it!" she said stoutly.

"We go away next week," said Moyna; "I am glad. I am sick of London."

"Get the roses back to your pretty cheeks while you are away, and I will try and ferret out this mystery," said Mrs. Vincent cheerfully. And Moyna Westwood went home feeling brighter and happier than she had done for months.

But the problem that Mrs. Vincent had set herself utterly baffled her all the summer, though the more she thought of it the less she believed in Frank Tressilyan's baseness. She called at 140 Guilford Street, only to learn that Mrs. Tressilyan had gone abroad. So had Frank, thought Mrs. Vincent, with something like a sigh for poor Moyna.

"It can't be true!" she said to herself. She wrote often and cheerfully to Moyna, to whom her letters were a godsend. They seemed to act as a tonic, almost as efficient on one as change of air and sea breezes.

When the end of September came Moyna returned to London. Her first visit was to Mrs. Vincent.

"Just in time," she exclaimed, "and how much better you look. I am just going to call on the Marstons, and you can come with me."

Moyna was nothing loth, so they started, Mrs. Vincent pouring all the latest gossip into her ears as they went.

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Ushered into Mrs. Marston's pretty drawing-room, they found it crowded, and a buzz of talk was in progress. Moyna, separated from her chaperon, presently found herself in a corner near the window, with leisure to look at the crowd. Almost the first face her eyes fell upon was that of Frank Tressilyan!

Yet was it her old lover? He looked across at her without the faintest sign of recognition. Moyna's heart almost stood still.

It beat again, however, when, five minutes later, her hostess brought Frank Tressilyan over to her and presented him.

"Mr. Francis Tressilyan. Not Frank, you know, but Francis."

"Frank is my cousin," said Francis Tressilyan, in a pleasant voice. To his stupefaction and Mrs. Marston's utter astonishment, Moyna Westwood threw up her arms with a wild shriek and fell fainting to the floor.

In a second all was confusion, but Francis Tressilyan picked her up in his strong arms and carried her into an ante-room. When he returned, a moment later, he came face to face with Mrs. Vincent, hurrying to Moyna.

"Frank Tressilyan!" she exclaimed.

"No. Francis!" said that perplexed individual.

"Don't go," cried Mrs. Vincent; "I must speak to you. I must." The truth had flashed upon her in a moment. "It is most important. Forgive me, but I will see you as soon as I have seen Moyna."

Bewildered and puzzled, Francis Tressilyan hardly knew what to do. Mrs. Vincent was a perfect stranger to him, but the name she had applied to the girl who had fainted at sight of him, and whom he had carried to the ante-room, seemed to awaken a dim recollection in his mind. He felt he had heard it before.

In a few minutes Mrs. Vincent came back.

"She is all right now. It was the sudden shock of seeing you."

"But, madam, pardon me, I have never met Miss Westwood before."

"You are Frank Tressilyan?"

"No. His cousin Francis."

Mrs. Vincent almost wrung her hands. But luckily the greater part of the guests had gone, so that her impetuous gestures were not noticed.

"Forgive me, Mr. Tressilyan," she exclaimed, "but are you married?" The abrupt question so startled Francis Tressilyan that he hesitated.

"Oh, I can see it all!" cried Mrs. Vincent, before he had time to reply. Then she sank into a chair, and she afterwards confessed that she never felt so much like going into hysterics in her life. Remembering Moyna, she pulled herself together with an effort.

"Will you sit down and listen?" she said, and Francis Tressilyan sat down. "Miss Moyna Westwood was engaged to your cousin——"

"Oh!" exclaimed her companion; "now I remember that quaint name of hers."

"Yes — yes — but let me speak! Last February she received a photograph and a letter—it was on St. Valentine's Day—and the letter was signed 'Margaret Tressilyan'——"

"Margaret!" exclaimed Francis.

"And the photograph was one of two people side by side—Margaret herself and Moyna Westwood's lover."

"No," said Francis Tressilyan, quietly; "it was myself."

"Then you are——"

"I was Margaret's husband."

"Was?"

"Yes. She died in South Africa a month ago.

"But the letter—the letter. It told Moyna Westwood that Frank had deceived her."

"It was not true. But had you only known her as well as I knew her, the woman who called herself Margaret Vane, you would not have been surprised for one moment at any act of villainy she committed. Let me tell you one thing. She had a hatred, a deep and bitter hatred, of my cousin, because he tried to prevent my marrying her; and she knew it. I was wild and headstrong, and would not listen to him until too late. I soon found out my mistake. But when Frank succeeded in separating me from a woman who was—forgive me for speaking ill of the dead—dragging me to ruin, she never forgave him."

"And so this——"

"This was her revenge—clever—to separate him from the woman he loved."

"How alike you are!" said Mrs. Vincent, after a long pause. She hardly knew what to say. Everything now to her was as clear as could be.

"But how was it that Frank never came to see Miss Westwood, to explain?"

"Moyna herself confessed to me," said Mrs. Vincent, "that she simply wrote and told him she never wanted to see him again."

"But surely——" began Francis Tressilyan.

"I think I can tell you," said Moyna from the door. The drawing-room was now quite empty, save for the three, Mrs. Marston having, with the tact of a woman of the world, withdrawn. Francis sprang to his feet.

"Miss Westwood, can you ever forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive anyone, except myself," said Moyna quietly. "I have heard all you have said, and had I had more belief in—in Frank—I should have spared myself this—this——"

But she could say no more. Francis Tressilyan gave her a chair and walked to the window. He remembered how his cousin Frank had spoken to him, long ago, of the charming girl with whom he had fallen in love, and he recollected the pretty, quaint name. Presently he returned to the seat he had left.

"Miss Westwood," he said, "let me do all I can to make amends for this terrible trouble."

"Forgive me," interposed Mrs. Vincent, "but did your late wife ever go to see your cousin?"

"Yes. To my knowledge she used to go to him when I was away from England, to obtain money that I sent her, and——"

Moyna Westwood sprang to her feet.

"I see it all!" she cried. "She was there on the eve of last St. Valentine, and in some way changed the letters, so that, instead of receiving one from Frank, her own came to me in his addressed envelope."

There was a moment's dead silence.

"She was capable of anything!" said Francis Tressilyan.

"Oh, I see it all so clearly!" continued Moyna, "but cannot put it together."

"Come home and we will think it out," said Mrs. Vincent.

"But Frank—where is he?"

"That is my affair," said Frank's cousin quietly. "I will have him in London before a month is over, or my name is not what it is!"

* * * * *

There is little more to tell. Francis Tressilyan was as good as his word, and before a month was over Moyna Westwood was in her lover's arms once more. His explanation was simple. He had written to her on St. Valentine's Eve, saying that he had lost a large part of his income, and should she—Moyna—decline to see him again, he should understand that their engagement was at an end. He could not ask her to marry a poor man. Before posting the letter, Margaret Tressilyan had called upon him at his chambers, and had presumably—and there was but little doubt of this—changed the contents—an artistic valentine and Frank's letter—for the photograph and her own vengeful epistle.

* * * * *

"When shall it be, dear?" said Frank, a few weeks later. "May I fix the date?"

Moyna only blushed, and clasped her lover's hand in her own.

"Silence gives consent, so I fix it for the fourteenth of February," said he. And with a tender kiss he sealed it.

Clifton Bingham.

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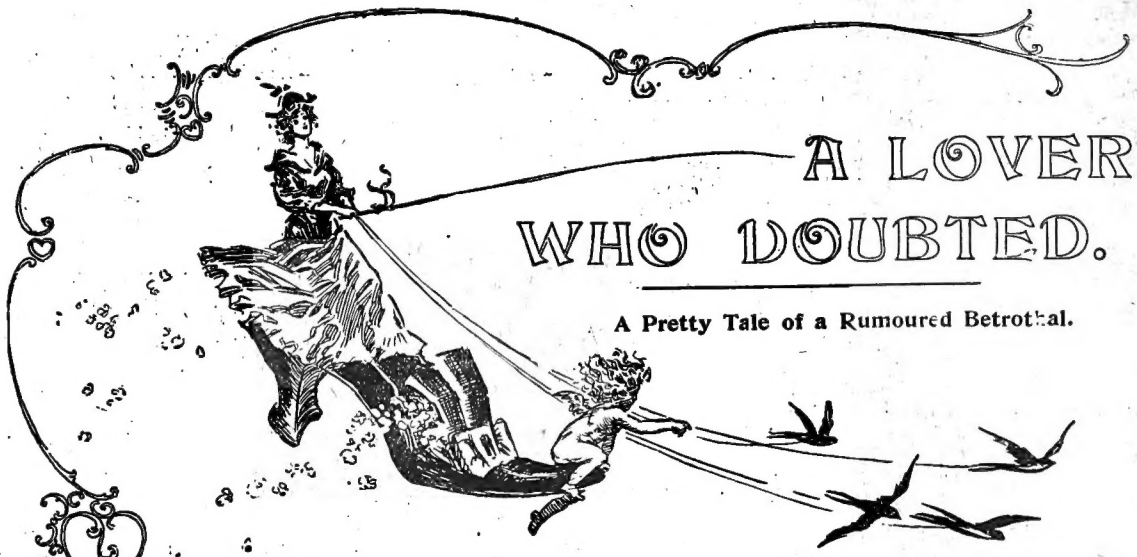

A LOVER WHO DOUBTED.

A Pretty Tale of a Rumoured Betrothal.

"WRITE to me sometimes, Nan," Gladwyn said. "You know time will not pass so quickly with me as it will with you, Nan, dearest."

"Oh, I will," she answered. "That is, if you don't demand long letters. I never can write a long letter properly, but notes or postcards, now?"—she smiled a question into his eyes.

"Oh, postcards!" Gladwyn objected. "Make it notes, Nan, as short as you please, only put them inside envelopes."

"I'll remember—that is, I'll try. Oh, the train's moving! John, you must get off. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, dear, and good-bye, Mrs. Wentworth," he grasped a hand of each. "God bring you safely and happily home again." The train steamed off, Nan waving her handkerchief from the window. He answered from the platform by a wave and lift of his hat, then turned squarely about and walked towards the place where a carriage stood waiting.

"Home!" he bade the driver, as he entered and settled himself amongst the cushions, which still bore a hint of the perfume Nan so dearly loved. A rosebud from her bouquet, broken off at the stem, lay on the carpet at his feet. He caught it up and crushed it against his lips, then, bowed forward with his face in his hands, he sat without moving until the opening of the carriage door aroused him.

He straightened himself with a start and stared at the man's mildly wondering face.

"We're home, sir," he heard.

"Oh, yes. Thank you, Brooks," John said, and alighted at once. As he mounted the steps on his way into the house he held one hand closely shut at his side. In it was Nan's rosebud.

Most of you know what a house is like when you go into it after it has been emptied of the presence that filled it with life and delight.

It is as if all that made it a goodly and pleasant thing had been carried dead out across the threshold; there is an unearthly stillness and vastness there, and the unearthly loneliness as well, which strikes you like a breath of pain as you enter.

John went slowly down the great entrance hall towards his own study door. He dared not look to right or left.

It seemed to him that at any instant one of those closed doors might open and show him a white, girlish shape on the threshold, or a step might sound on the shallow, polished stair and Nan's mocking laughter ring down to him as it had so often rung.

The study was the only place in the whole house which had not changed in his brief absence from it. He put his hat and gloves aside, and sat down in his revolving chair.

The morning had but fairly begun, as he could see from the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece. Beside the clock was a recent photograph of Nan, which she had placed there herself upon one of her infrequent visits hither. Upon the desk before him was a tinted miniature, as nearly life-like as a picture may be. He took this in his hand and examined it closely.

How would she come back to him? With her soft eyes full of the old dreams, her mouth all sweetly innocent of kisses as a child, the old sunshine in her hair, her heart free still from the care love brings? God grant it so.

But if, indeed, it needs must be otherwise, God grant him grace to bear it like a man, such a man as only was worthy to love her.

Yesterday—surely it could be no further back than yesterday—she had stood beside him here in this very room, a little child. To-day she was a woman grown—and the room was empty of her!

But he sat here still a man, fast growing elderly, whom Fame bespoke kindly, too grave perhaps, for such a winsome gaiety as hers, yet loving and missing her, God knows how deeply.

A year! It would be short enough for her to whom enjoyment was new. The old cities—the old sights—he knew well enough how keen would be her delight in them. But he must sit quietly here at home writing the books a greedy public demanded—writing them with pen only while his heart roamed unrebuked in distant lands with her.

He put the minitaure down and opened the book which he had left off reading a few hours before. He laid the rosebud reverently across a page and closed the book upon it; then, rising, put it away upon the shelf. So had he shut the sweetly fragrant secret of his love into his life against the time when she should pluck it forth.

Next day came a note from Nan, written from the house of the friend with whom she and her mother were staying until ready to start.

"DEAR COUSIN JOHN," she wrote, "you see it's to be notes after all, not postcards, and here is the first one! Are you looking after the doggie as you should? And the birds—don't let the maid forget them. And is Mrs. Hunter looking after you? I hope your coffee is hot in the mornings and strong enough to please you. How is the book getting along?

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You ought to accomplish wonders in that big, quiet house, with no such hindrances to annoy you as your naughty cousin —Nan."

The next note was inclosed in a letter of her mother's and bore the Continental post-mark. Ah, well! Her feet were on Continental soil at last. And she still had a thought for him. All that summer his heart followed her in her journeyings from the Swiss Alps to Venice's purple lagoons. Autumn found them settled for the winter in Rome. A box of such things as tourists love to gather came to him from there, and what he prized most of all was a sheaf of Roman lilies, still fairly fresh, and breathing forth exquisitely their pent-up fragrance. Once she wrote:

"Rome is lovely—better than all my dreams. It only needs one thing to be quite perfect, and that is—no, I won't tell you, though you may guess if you can. Oh, Cousin John, you should see me holding court! These young Italians and some of my own countrymen, too, pay me as much honour as if I were a queen in very truth. Already I have refused a title, and they tell me there is another at my command. It is as if I were taking part in a play."

How much of her heart was in all this John didn't know. She was surrounded by men, young, handsome, courtly, some of whom it seemed must sooner or later capture her girlish fancy.

Once he thought he would himself go to Rome. To be near her were surely better than to stay here with this gnawing suspense. Then his heart failed him.

What chance had he there—he, old and plain, and so grave among men who knew the value of a compliment, who bought favour with the golden coin of smiles and courtly graces?

No, he would stay and bear it, as he might, and when she came back—if she came back——

For days he roamed the country over with gun on his shoulder and a brace of dogs at his heels. I don't know that he shot anything, but the exercise and the keen, strong open air did him good and kept his head clear.

Two weeks before Christmas he received a box and a letter from Rome. Then began a silence that lasted until the days could be gathered into weeks. No further word came from either Nan or her mother.

One morning, as John sat lingering over his coffee and the *Daily Courier*, a friend, who lived on a neighbouring estate, strode in, crop in hand, just as he sprang from the big yellow hunter which the groom was holding at the door.

"No, I can't sit down," he said in answer to John's invitation. "Ah, I see you have the *Daily Courier* there! Seen the news from Rome? That pretty little cousin of yours is doing what she likes with Roman hearts. But they say she is fairly caught at last. Nothing like a title to win a girl's fancy. Wonder if we'll all get asked over for the wedding?"

John turned cold and white. His hand shook. Nevertheless, he managed to smooth out the sheet and read the paragraph pointed out to him. There it was in black and white. "Rumour has it that the beautiful Miss Wentworth will soon marry the young Prince di Aligheri, who has for some time been devoted to her."

After his friend had gone, John still sat on the at table. His coffee turned cold in the cup and a little slanting sunbeam wandering among the breakfast things reflected its gay gleam upon its surface. So this was the end of it all! His dream—his dear, foolish dream was over, and he was awake at last to know he must dream no more for ever. Well, if it meant happiness for her he could bear it bravely—if she loved this prince—if he loved her—ah, no man, John knew, could love her better than he himself had. Had? Did? Would so long as he lived. But why had they not written? Surely they need not fear his disapproval.

The servant came in, a little bewildered at finding him still at table. John rose.

"I fear I have kept you waiting, Margaret," he said, and went out of the room to his own study. He never knew how he got through that day. The maid came to see if he would have luncheon. "No!" "Dinner?" "No!"

"The master do look awful," she told her companions in the kitchen. "Something dreadful must have happened to make him look like that."

All night John sat at his desk staring blankly at the opposite wall. The clock on the mantelpiece, where was Nan's picture, ticked wearily on until it stopped dead. Morning came, and with it much sunshine and twittering of birds looking for their breakfast outside underneath the windows. The day was February 14th, St. Valentine's Day. John had sunk forward upon his desk; his tired head resting on his folded arms. He had fallen asleep.

The servants went about softly, wondering if the master would be as queer to-day as he was yesterday. Suddenly there was a bustle and confusion throughout the house. A cab had driven to the door and deposited two ladies, who entered the house with an air of gay mystery about them.

"Cousin John—where is he?" was demanded.

The stupefied maid pointed towards the study and stammered something. The girl left her mother to explain and give orders, and ran down the hall. Her hand grasped the brass handle tremulously. It turned, and the door slid open.

She went a little way into the room, then paused as she saw the sleeping man before her. Her finger touched her lips instinctively, and for an instant she pondered. Then her face broke into a mischievous smile, and, unwrapping something from her handkerchief, she flung it at the bowed head. It fell with a soft thud—a golden rose!

John woke. He was dazed with suffering and heavy sleep, but he saw the rose quick enough and caught it up, staring at it as if it were a fairy gift. Then a laugh rang in his ear and two hands fell on his shoulder. He wheeled round and beheld Nan, rosy above her furs, standing beside him.

"Oh, Cousin John, do you know what day this is? That's my valentine you have in your hand. I brought it all the way from Mr. Green's hothouse, wrapped in my handkerchief—it's the finest he had and worth its weight in gold. We've travelled night and day, mamma and I, to surprise you. I couldn't stand it any longer. I just had to come home and see the doggie and the birds and—and—you, of course, you dear old, stupid Cousin John. Aren't you glad to see me? Now tell me!" Her eyes laughed into his.

He caught her by the arms and held her close.

"The prince!" he demanded sternly.

She hung her head.

"Oh, you've heard that wretched story. I didn't mean you should, that is—oh, Cousin John, it wasn't true, not a word of it. I never cared for him, and I—I begged mamma to bring me home. That's all."

"And enough," John said. A great light broke over his face. He drew her down on his knee and laid her head on his shoulder and bent his over it. She was crying.

"And you've come home to me," he said, in an odd, shaky voice. "Just as I used to dream you would. Is it true—shall I believe it? Oh, Nan, my child, my darling, look in my eyes and tell me what it all means." He put his hand under her chin and tipped the sweet, shy face towards his. Her lashes slowly lifted.

"Why, don't you know?" she said. "You're such a dear old stupid, John! It just means that—that I'm your valentine!"

Constance Coniagh.

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Two Lovers and a Maid.

Telling How a Valentine went to the Wrong Person.

THE guard had whistled, the train had just begun to slip away from the platform, when a young gentleman rushed up to the moving carriages, opened the first one he came to, and flung himself in, having hurled in various minor articles of luggage before him. Putting his head out of the window he shouted to a groom standing on the platform:

"Have you seen to the luggage?" Receiving an affirmative touch of the hat, he added, at the top of his voice: "Tell them I was in lots of time," and subsided into his seat. Then recollecting the reckless way in which hat-box, sticks, and rug had preceded his entry, he looked round the carriage with a view to collecting them, and met the gaze of a fellow-passenger, at whose feet his hat-box had rolled.

This was a girl of about seventeen, with a small, pale face, clear-cut features, and a rather large mouth, whose amused expression displayed a very white and regular set of teeth.

"I am afraid I must have startled you by my abrupt entry," said he, agreeably surprised, as he picked up his various possessions, and began to arrange them in the rack above his head; "but it was a very near thing. I ran it rather too close."

"Indeed," rejoined the young lady. "I thought I overheard you say to someone on the platform that they were to be told you were in lots of time."

"A pious fraud!" exclaimed Mr. Trevor—to give our hero his name. "To have to scramble for your seat, as I have just done, is almost worse, in my governor's eyes, than to miss the train altogether."

As neither of the travellers was at all shy, they were soon deeply immersed in conversation, in the course of which the singular coincidence was elicited that they were both bound for the same destination.

"You see," said Trevor, who, after the ice had been broken by various commonplace remarks, had begun to wax confidential, "my father thinks it is time I got through sundry examinations. So he wouldn't let me go back to college this term, but packed me off to a parson; and I've got to read hard with him for the next three months. A lively time I shall have of it, by all accounts, down in Glendale."

"Glendale!" exclaimed the young lady, "Why I am going there. How very curious!"

"Indeed!" said Trevor, thinking it might not be quite so dreary as he had at first feared. "Do you live there?"

"No; I'm only going to stay with my aunt for a few weeks. It certainly is not a very lively place. But you knew I was going there," she added suddenly, "for you have read the label on my hand-bag. I've seen you looking at it a dozen times."

"I have certainly tried to read it," said Trevor, "but I could never get my neck far enough round to see the last word. 'Miss Kate Grey, Miss Foster, The Grange,' is as far as I ever managed. I hope we shall be able to keep the carriage to ourselves till we reach our destination."

And they did have it all to themselves as far as Glendale; during which time Miss Grey told him that she was very angry at having to leave home to-day, as to-morrow was Valentine's Day, and she felt sure her sisters would open her valentines to see from whom they came, and then pretend they did it under the belief that they were addressed to themselves. Mr. Trevor sympathised with her, inwardly resolving she should have one valentine, at least, that no one should open but herself.

At last they steamed into Glendale. A prim old lady standing on the platform as they passed being identified by Miss Grey as her aunt, the young lady suggested they should shake hands in the carriage. Which they did, Trevor remarking that it wasn't going to be good-bye for long, as of course he should see her often enough during the next month. At which Miss Grey blushed, and said, "Perhaps."

On emerging on to the platform Miss Grey was at once claimed and marched off by her aunt to point out her luggage to a porter; while a tall, handsome man of about thirty, in most untidy clerical garb, introduced himself to Trevor as the Reverend Paul Vyner, remarking that he believed he was right in supposing him to be Mr. Trevor.

* * * * *

We must now say a few words in defence of our heroine, whose conduct so far may appear indiscreet. Certainly she was wrong to enter into conversation with a strange young man in a railway carriage, and very wrong to more than half-promise to meet him on some future occasion; but as we have started a paragraph in defence of her, we must do our best in her behalf.

Firstly, then, she was caught laughing at his unceremonious entry, and so, in the most innocent way, laid herself open to be addressed. Secondly, he was not only a handsome man, but evidently a gentleman. Thirdly, she *was* a flirt, though a very pretty and innocent one, and was very glad to meet with someone likely to relieve the monotony of a month in the country with no one to speak to but an elderly maiden aunt.

Now all this may account for her behaviour down to this point; whether it will continue to do so is for the reader to judge.

"Aunt," began Miss Grey, at lunch, "who is the rector of the parish?"

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"Mr. Vyner, my dear," replied Miss Foster. "The Reverend Paul Vyner. He is a Cambridge man, and, I am told, of very good family. However, he is poor, and takes pupils. He conducts the service very badly, and is utterly useless in the parish."

"Oh! Has he any pupils just now?" inquired Miss Grey innocently.

"No, my dear," replied her aunt; "and I don't see what difference it would make to you if he had."

For Miss Foster, though a kind-hearted and good woman, was a great stickler for propriety. Her other main characteristic was that of saying disagreeable things she didn't mean, and was sorry for afterwards.

Miss Kate, having learnt all she wanted to know, now glided gently but swiftly away from the dangerous topic of young men, and being a bright, clever girl, succeeded in producing a favourable impression on her aunt.

During the afternoon she retired to unpack. In the course of this occupation she came upon a large envelope, which she took out of her trunk and balanced thoughtfully in her hand; then shook out the contents on to the dressing table and began sorting them through.

They were half-a-dozen cards, bearing the devices common to the feast of St. Valentine, which she had brought with her to dispatch from Glendale to various acquaintances.

Having selected one which seemed to suit her purpose, she wrote two lines on it in pencil, and, placing it in an envelope, directed it to:

"A. T.,
"Care of the Rev. P. Vyner,
"The Vicarage, Glendale."

For though Trevor knew her name, it being written in full on her luggage, she only knew his initials, which she could see printed on his hat-box. However, having ascertained from him that he was going to live at the vicarage, and from her aunt that the vicar's name was Paul Vyner, and that he had no other pupils just now, she felt sure that her letter, though vaguely addressed, must find the right person.

* * * * *

The next morning at the vicarage, when Mr. Trevor lounged down an hour late for breakfast, he found his future tutor in a curious state of bewilderment. "Considerably knocked out of time," commented that shrewd youth, when Mr. Vyner answered his apologies by saying in an absent way: "I believe it is only selfishness." And then perceiving by Trevor's face of astonishment that he must have said something very odd, he got up from his untouched breakfast, and went into the garden, pleading a headache.

This is what had happened.

On coming down that morning, he saw on the mantelpiece in the spot where his letters were always placed, an envelope with his name written across it. Being the most careless of men, he never noticed the "A. T." written above, so tore open the envelope, flung it behind him, and, to his surprise, found in his hands a card, bearing on it a gracefully-executed bunch of primroses, while underneath was written in a lady's hand:

"*In the Spring a young man's fancy*
Lightly turns to thoughts of love."

His first thought was to examine the envelope; he turned round to pick it up, but, alas! he had thrown it into the very heart of the fire, and nothing remained of it but a sheet of black ash.

After all, there would be nothing in this to account for the vicar's mental disquietude. The reception of a valentine from an unknown hand would scarcely disturb the equanimity of most young men.

But Kate's seed had fallen on fruitful ground.

It was singularly apposite (when opened by the wrong person), and chimed in so well with many of Mr. Vyner's thoughts during the last year or two, that, while the valentine in itself, or its sender, never cost him another thought, the tempest of recollections, wishes, self-reproaches, and plans for the future that it raised in him were more than he could at once allay.

The reflections that had so engrossed him at the breakfast-table, and which he was now attempting to reduce to order, by walking up and down the garden puffing furiously at a big pipe, ran briefly something like this:

"Why don't I marry? Is it, as I tell myself, because I do not wish? Because I am too poor? Because no girl would marry a slovenly object like me? Or is it because I am too selfish? Because I should have to sacrifice so much that has now become second nature to me? My bachelor's ease; my summers on the Continent; my untidy habits; and, wretch that I am, my claret and cigars? Do I do my duty here? Not a bit. I know no one intimately; I care for no one's opinion; I hate the place. With a wife, all that might be changed. A pleasant companion and a comfortable home are surely worth the surrender of a few of my special self-indulgences. I should be a better and a happier man. Besides," he thought, with a touch of selfishness on the other side of his argument, "she could do that horrid visiting; I absolutely dare not. I should resent anybody coming here and telling me I was leading a wretched and godless life. Why should anybody else be better pleased if I drop in at their cottage and tell them so? Women do that kind of thing much better than men do."

Thus the result of Miss Kate's valentine was that, for his own good and the good of his parish, the Rev. Paul Vyner decided to take unto himself a wife.

* * * * *

During the afternoon of St. Valentine's Day, Miss Grey started out for a walk, and we blush to state that she stopped the first rustic she met, and asked the way to the vicarage.

"It will amuse me to see him, and please him to see me," ruminated the young lady. "And, after all, where is the harm so long as we understand each other?"

With which very stale apology for flirtation she comforted herself, and strolled on until she came to the vicarage.

The house, a handsome, old, red-brick building, stood in extensive grounds surrounded by a high fence.

On one side, between this fence and the adjoining fields, ran a narrow lane, and down this lane Kate made her way, trying to persuade herself that she went there because it was pretty, and a likely spot to find primroses, and not because it was now possible for her to see into and be seen from the vicarage grounds.

So she dawdled listlessly down the lane, half-amused and half-angry with her own folly; at one minute wishing to see Trevor, at another, hoping she should not; poking the end of her parasol into the banks as she passed with a vague sort of idea that that was a recognised way of hunting for wild flowers.

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Suddenly she was brought to a full stop by a voice right above her, inquiring if she were looking for anything.

Kate turned her eyes up, and mentally decided that she had seldom seen a handsomer man than the one now leaning over the hedge, and in whose eyes she was quick to detect no little admiration of herself.

And certainly the parson in his lawn-tennis costume was a goodly sight. Six feet high, long in the leg, broad in the shoulder, and flat in the back, his loose flannel attire displayed as much as his dilapidated clericals concealed, his personal advantages. His handsome, clean-shaven face glowing with exercise, small head, and closely-cropped, dark curls, surmounted by a shooting cap, which he had pushed back as far as was compatible with its remaining on his head at all, formed a whole that was undeniably pleasant.

But before going any further let us just account for the vicar's presence and his pupil's absence.

After lunch Mr. Vyner had suggested a game of tennis. Both being expert, they had no difficulty in keeping themselves warm, even in February, and were just playing the deciding game of a hard-fought set, when suddenly Trevor remarked:

"I say, isn't this St. Valentine's Day?"

"Yes," replied his opponent, thinking that it was the first time for ten years that he had any special reason for recollecting the date. "Yes; why?"

"Well," said Trevor, "I ought to send a valentine. I'm afraid I'm rather late about it. Where can I get one?"

"I don't know much about that kind of thing," returned the parson. "But I should say not in Glendale."

"I think Moresborough is your nearest town. How far is that off?" inquired Trevor.

"About two miles."

"Then, if you'll excuse me," said the young gentleman, turning rather red, "I think I'll run over there."

"Certainly," replied the vicar, surprised at finding himself so sympathetic.

And so it came to pass that while Mr. Trevor hurried over to Moresborough as fast as his legs could carry him, his preceptor took a stroll round the vicarage grounds, and, coming to a railing in the fence overlooking the lane, leant over it, lost in reverie.

He was startled by the apparition of a young lady strolling slowly down the lane towards him.

"Surely," said the parson, "you are a little too early; they don't blossom till May."

Then seeing by Kate's extreme discomfiture that she was meditating a hasty retreat, he deceitfully added:

"At least most of them. Of course there might be a few early ones about, but they are rather difficult to find. I'll come and help you hunt for them, if I may."

The next minute he was on the path by her side, looking rather ashamed of his own alacrity. Though of late he had abjured female society, he was not one of those unfortunate men who cannot open their mouths in a lady's presence; and in a few minutes he had set Kate at her ease by a few commonplace remarks.

A very pleasant change the vicar found it from his ordinary afternoon's employment, to saunter down a lane with a pretty and amusing girl. There was a spice of romance about the suddenness of their acquaintance that just suited his present state of mind; while the mischievous Kate almost laughed outright, when she remembered that she had come out to look for the pupil, at finding herself strolling about in a confidential manner with the tutor.

But all good things must have an end, and when they had walked to the top of the lane and back once or twice, Miss Grey said she must be going.

"I hope I shall see you again shortly," said he, as they parted. "I must make up some excuse to call upon Miss Foster." And then he leant over the gate, and watched her graceful figure to the corner in the road where she turned back and smiled.

The vicar, forgetting alike his manners and his cloth, kissed his hand to her, then bolted down the lane as hard as he could, blushing like a girl; until he was suddenly pulled up in his stride by a thought so ridiculous that it at first made him laugh, and then made him downright angry with himself for being such an idiot.

"I have decided I want a wife; why won't she do?" he thought.

On reaching the house he found Trevor just returned. He held a parcel in his hand, and asked the vicar if he had a small box that he could pack it in, as he wished to dispatch it by post.

"Come into my study," said the latter, "and we will see what we can find."

After a few minutes' rummaging about, Trevor found one to suit him. It was a small cardboard box that had lately come down from London with some fishing-tackle, and still had the vicar's address upon it. This box Trevor carried off; and placing the parcel within it, dispatched it to Miss Grey, astutely remarking to himself that "It would be a pity to scratch old Vyner's name out, as then she won't guess who it comes from; but knowing I am at the vicarage, and seeing the parson's name on the box, I shall get the credit of it."

* * * * *

It was with considerably more consternation than pleasure that, next morning, when Miss Grey opened this parcel, she found herself the possessor of a very handsome locket and chain. Never doubting that the parson was the donor, she argued that she had given him no right to take such liberty.

She grew angry with him for his want of tact; and then remembering her valentine to Trevor, and the fact that she had taken that eventful walk solely to meet him, she grew angry with herself, and was also illogical enough to be angry with him for not meeting her, or sending any answer to his missive; for which variety of reasons she avoided the side of the village on which the vicarage lay.

Trevor, not seeing or hearing anything of her, decided he had offended her by sending her presents on so short an acquaintance, and reviled his folly for so doing. But of the three Mr. Vyner's plight was the worst. That ridiculous idea of his, that Kate, if he could persuade her, would make him the very wife he wanted, would keep recurring to him. In vain he told himself he had only seen her once; in vain he tried to persuade himself that what he had seen he didn't like; he was haunted by the idea, and at the end of a day or two he made up his mind to see her again at all hazards.

Having arrived at this decision, he was prompt to act upon it. Making as an excuse a subscription for a Christmas treat to the poor children of the parish, he called the very next morning upon Miss Foster.

That good lady received him in a manner peculiarly her own.

"Good morning, Mr. Vyner," said she. "It is a very long time since I have seen you. I suppose you want some money."

Mr. Vyner explained the object of his visit as well as he could, remarking that the idea only occurred to him that very morning; that the third week in February was late for a

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Christmas treat; but that he supposed children could eat cake at any time of the year.

Kindly Miss Foster told him that he was the worst clergyman both in the church and the parish she had ever met with, and then got up to fetch her cheque-book, remarking, as she went out of the room:

"That's my niece, Katie, dear, Mr. Vyner, our vicar."

There was a very embarrassing pause when they found themselves alone. Then he said blunderingly:

"You see, Miss Grey, I found an excuse."

"I hope," said Kate, "you don't mean me to believe that this children's treat exists only in your imagination, for my aunt has gone to get some money to pay for it."

"No, not exactly," said the vicar, who felt himself on rather dangerous ground.

"Because," continued the young lady, "I should not think very highly of you, if such were the case, Mr. Vyner."

Kate decided that she had seldom seen a handsomer man than the Vicar who was addressing her.

And then rapidly leaving the subject, she remarked in very chilling accents upon the state of the weather.

Mr. Vyner, who was no fool, in spite of his infatuation, was quick to perceive by Miss Grey's manner that he had not found favour in her sight, and immediately there flashed across his mind a remembrance of the parting salute he had waved to her.

Just then Miss Foster's step was heard outside. Determining to make the most of his opportunity, he bent down over her seat and said:

"Miss Grey, I owe you an apology for my conduct. At the risk of making matters worse, I'm going to beg of you to take a walk to-morrow afternoon in the lane where we met before, and I will try and remove the bad impression I fear I have made on you."

Before he could receive any reply, Miss Foster entering, handed him a cheque, and begged to know if it was enough.

The vicar, who felt heartily ashamed of this part of the business, began to stammer something about munificence, but was speedily cut short by the old lady, who said that now he had got what he wanted, he need not make himself miserable by stopping any longer out of politeness; that she herself was not amusing company; that Kate never flirted in her aunt's presence, whatever she did out of it; that doubtless his duties in the parish required his presence elsewhere, and fairly drove the poor gentleman out of the house.

The next afternoon the vicar, who was now growing old in deceit, gave Trevor a holiday, dispatched him to Moresborough on various pretences, and then went and sat on the railing, where he had first seen Kate, and smoked his pipe and waited.

He had resolved that he would fall in love with her if she would let him; and he was wondering how long she would consider he ought to cultivate her acquaintance before making any advances of that sort, when her slender figure came slowly down the road.

In another minute he was below, shaking hands with her.

"I don't think I ought to have done this," said Kate; "but as you asked me, you must not think any the worse of me for it; and"—extracting the obnoxious parcel from her pocket—"I have brought you back your very kind present."

"Done what?" said the astounded vicar.

"Brought back the chain and locket," said Kate. "I was so sorry you sent it. I have been very silly, but I never gave you the right to send me this."

"But," said Paul, turning Trevor's luckless valentine over and over in his hand, "I never sent you anything. Hallo! this box is directed to me. Why, it's that young scamp Trevor, who sent it to you; I gave him the box. How came he to send you a valentine?"

Poor Kate! This was turning the tables on her with a vengeance.

"I suppose because I sent him one first," she said defiantly.

"Well!" returned the Reverend Paul, "this is most extraordinary. I suppose you sent it by a messenger. There was only one letter delivered at the vicarage on St. Valentine's Day, and that was for me."

"Oh!" said Kate, glad to get a chance, however poor, of carrying the war a little into the enemy's country. "Is she good-looking?"

"Who?" said the vicar innocently.

"Why, the young lady who sent you the valentine."

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"I haven't the least idea who sent it. I burnt the envelope without looking at either writing or post-mark. Here it is," he added, taking a crumpled piece of card from his pocket, and handing it to her.

"Why!" said Kate, "that's the valentine I sent Mr. Trevor."

"Impossible!" cried Paul; "it was addressed to me."

"No, I am sure this is it. It was addressed, 'A. T., care of the Rev. P. Vyner.' You see," said Katie, "I knew he was at the vicarage, but I didn't know his name."

"I am so sorry," began the parson. "I quite thought it was addressed to me. Indeed, I scarcely looked at the outside at all. It stood where all my letters are always placed, and I opened it, never doubting it was for me."

"I am so glad he never got it," said Kate. "I have been ashamed of myself ever since I sent it. I am afraid you must be dreadfully disgusted with me."

"I think she's very pretty," said Paul, smiling rather wickedly.

"Who?" asked Kate.

"Who! Why, the young lady that sent me the valentine, of course."

"Oh," said Kate slowly, and looking down on the ground.

Then, as if anxious to change the subject, she suddenly asked:

"What were you going to apologise to me about? As you didn't send me that thing, how did you think you had offended me?"

"I was afraid you were angry because I kissed my hand to you when we parted last time," said Paul, stammering and blushing, and scarcely knowing what he said.

"I suppose I ought to have been offended," said Kate, laughing; "but, the truth is, I did not think you quite knew what you were doing. I—I forgot all about it the next moment."

There was a minute's silence, broken suddenly by Paul:

"Kate, I may offend you in reality now, but I cannot help it. Will you forgive *me?* Nay, more; will you give me some answer if I ask you to be my wife?"

"Your wife!" cried Kate. "Impossible, Mr. Vyner; I know nothing of you, and what you know of me is not to my credit. You cannot mean what you say."

"Listen to me," said Paul, quite in earnest now, and catching both her hands in his. "I have loved you since the first moment I saw you; I have tried to persuade myself that it was impossible; I have laughed at my own folly, as I thought it—but all to no purpose. Kate, I love you. What chance have I of winning your love in return? Not now—I am not so foolish as to suppose you can answer me yet—but in the future."

"But I know so little of you," stammered Kate.

"That, at any rate," said Paul, who was beginning to think he should have his own way, "can easily be remedied. Suppose, for instance, we walk up and down here once or twice, and cultivate each other's acquaintance."

So they wandered up and down the lane for the rest of the afternoon. We have never learnt exactly what passed between them, but they seemed to be perfectly satisfied with each other's company.

Suddenly the *tête-à-tête* was broken in upon by a voice from the railing where Kate had first seen the parson.

"Hallo!" said Mr. Trevor; "I hope you two are getting on all right. Good afternoon, Miss Grey."

"Trevor, come back here," said the Reverend Paul. "I wish to give you back this from Miss Grey. Don't take offence, my boy; you must see you had no earthly right to send it."

"There's only one decent way out of this hole," said Trevor imperturbably; "and that is, that Miss Grey should keep it as a wedding-present."

And Miss Grey was graciously pleased to receive it on those terms.

Thus everything turned out all right.

Barry Lefevre.

A Stitch in Time.

EVERYONE knows that a stitch in time saves nine, so, readers, take warning of the old proverb, and make a note not to miss entering our coming competition. There will be thousands of persons going in for it, but do not be deterred by this fact. You have quite as good an opportunity of carrying off one of the magnificent prizes that will be offered as anyone has, for this most novel and unique of schemes will be equally interesting to all types and classes of readers. It will form a most diverting pastime to while away an idle evening, and, if you are diligent enough to win a prize, you will find you will be most handsomely rewarded. I can promise you that whilst you study the competition you will indulge in many smiles that won't come off.

To You All.

I HOPE you are all pleased with this, our Valentine Number. I think you will find it bears out my appreciatory remarks about it in preceding chats. This column is a very great boon to me, as in it I am able to foreshadow my future ideas for the welfare of this little paper. I know my readers take what I say in good faith, for the letters that I constantly receive tell me so. Many correspondents at the end of their epistles say, "With apologies for troubling you"; now, to all such I wish to point out that, far from being worried by your letters, I am delighted to read them, and if possible to act on their suggestions. So do not think, when you get it in your head to write to me, that I am anything but pleased to hear from you.

"Running Riddles" Competition—Result.

THIS competition was announced in the Christmas Number. A great number of readers entered, and many of the replies were most ingenious. After very careful scrutiny of all the attempts, it has been decided to award the prize of £2 to

WILLIAM VICKERS,
26 Hythe Park Road,
Staines,

whose answers were decidedly clever.

The Five Hand Cameras, with complete Photographic Outfit, are won by Miss A. Arthur, Greengairs, Airdrie, N.B.; W. C. Hodsdon, Mill Rise, Church Road, Teddington; Mrs. Henrietta Suffling, 1 Portsdown Road, Maida Vale, W.; Miss Mary May, 139 Fulham Road, South Kensington, S.W.; and B. J. Whall, Lynwood, Millport, N.B.

The Seventh Love Problem.

I HAVE very much pleasure in announcing that Mr. Arthur Taylor, of 30 Napier Road, Leytonstone, is the winner of the guinea I offered in connection with the Seventh Unsolved Love Problem.

Your Editor.

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OLD VALENTINES.

I turned an old box out to-night,
A task that I had long neglected;
A bundle dingy met my sight,
A packet strangely unexpected.
Of fleeting time it bore the signs,
In opening it I felt quite chary;
Yet they were but old Valentines,
And dated fourteenth February

One was from Charlie — silly boy,
He was ten years too young to marry.
"The heart is but a woman's toy";
The next said, 'twas from Cousin Harry.
"The rose is red, the violet blue";
How silly now sounds that old motto;
I kissed the sender once — poor Hugh,
And mother told me I ought not to.

An arrow through two hearts the next,
Entwined about with verse impassioned;
From Jack — and oh he was so vexed,
Because I said 'twas so old-fashioned.
Another — such a quaint device —
How sweet — I wonder if he meant it;
What charming lines — it would be nice
If I could recollect who sent it!

Well — put them in the fire — good-bye!
To keep them now seems rather stupid;
Their givers married — so did I —
And no one now thinks much of Cupid.
You're out of date, Saint Valentine,
Your florid cards, your verse impassioned;
Yet take my hand, dear husband mine,
Thank God true love is not old-fashioned.

C.B.

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SPLENDID NEW SERIES. **BEGIN READING TO-DAY.**

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin, at the hands of her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on his daughter, from whom he has been separated for many years.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

SIXTH EPISODE.

Half-Confidences.

"A MOST terrible thing! It is enough to make one afraid to leave the house."

"Yes, I think it is simply awful! Just fancy us seeing the poor man in good health only last night, and now! Oh, Beverley, it can't be true!"

I had been standing beside my father for some little time, wondering how it was that both he and Mrs. Sherwood were so agitated, that they seemed to be quite oblivious of my presence.

But, though they talked past me, just as if they thought themselves alone in the room, it was impossible for them to really overlook me, and I knew quite well that they intended me to hear all they said.

"Last night!" I exclaimed. "What has happened since last night? And of whom are you speaking?"

Mrs. Sherwood affected to give a violent start of surprise, and my father uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Upon my word, Vivienne," he said irritably, "it seems impossible to keep anything from you, for you are here, there, and everywhere. But I daresay you will show less curiosity after you are more accustomed to the ways of the world."

"You have not answered my questions," was my answer, spoken calmly enough, in spite of my father's censorious attitude. "Were you alluding to Mr. O'Connell?"

"Why should you think that?"

"Because you expected him to dine with you last night. And because Mrs. Sherwood spoke of 'seeing the poor man in good health only last night.'"

"Well, I suppose you are sure to hear all about it, anyway, so you may as well hear it from us. Mr. O'Connell's dead body was found in the river last night, near London Bridge, and now lies in the mortuary."

Mrs. Sherwood was sobbing violently, with her face hidden in her handkerchief, and even my father's lips were quivering with emotion, while his face wore a most curious expression, just as if he were only simulating grief, which, of course, he must really be feeling.

As for me, the shock nearly made me faint. But I made a strong effort at self-control, and exclaimed:

"But how could his body be found last night, when he did not leave here till long after nine?"

"How do you know that?" was the sharp query, which showed me that I had made an incautious admission, if I did not want to betray what I was doing last night. Happily, I am fairly quick-witted, and was able to rectify my mistake at once.

"If he dined with you," I said, "I don't see how he could possibly leave here much before ten. And if he stayed still longer, it is less than ever likely that the body which was found last night could be his."

A breath of relief preceded my father's next words, although they were spoken gloomily.

"Unfortunately," he said, "there is no mistake as regards identity, for some letters and a card-case established that beyond doubt. It seems almost too awful to credit, but the unfortunate man must have met his death soon after he left here, for the body was found and identified in time for the tragedy to be reported in the morning papers."

"Is—is it suicide?" I gasped, for it had suddenly struck me that self-destruction might possibly have been the eventual outcome of Mr. O'Connell's disappointed love-making.

But my father's next words dispelled this fear.

"No," he said firmly, "it cannot have been suicide, for there is a great wound on the head, which must have caused death before the body was thrown into the river, after it had been stripped of money and valuables. It is a case of murder, murder most foul, and to me has fallen the painful duty of setting the authorities on the track of the murderer."

"But how can you do that?"

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"By simply describing what happened last night. Mr. O'Connell dined with us, but pleaded an engagement which compelled him to leave here at half-past nine. I daresay he would have stayed longer, if my answer to his proposal for your hand had been different. But Fate willed it that he hurried away. Unfortunately, also, he drank more Veuve Clicquot than was good for him, and the instant he stepped into the fresh air its effects were painfully manifest. He became drowsy, and staggered so much that I had to help him down to the gate. A growler was passing at the time, and, with the aid of the cabman, I got Mr. O'Connell inside. Then I told the cabby to take him to the Cecil, and the sequel is easily guessed at. The cabman has robbed and murdered him, and he would meet with no resistance, for O'Connell was absolutely helpless when I saw the last of him."

I listened to all this as if I were in a dream, and my father, hastily turning to leave us, added:

"And now I am going to the police station to tell all I know, and to give as accurate a description of the murderer as I can. I shall never forgive myself for letting O'Connell drive off alone, although it did not occur to me that he would not be quite safe. But I can at least help to avenge his death, by putting justice on the right trail."

"Oh, Beverley," wailed Mrs. Sherwood, whose emotion was still too great to allow her to show her face, "I wish you wouldn't mix yourself up in the case! Just fancy! We were the last people who saw him alive before the cabman drove away with him. Suppose we were actually blamed over it!"

"Don't be so absurd!" was the ill-mannered reproof to this outburst. "Whether I am blamed or not, I must do my duty. And I am sure Vivienne will support me when I say that the only right thing for me to do is to tell all I know."

Was this remark intended as a challenge? I thought not. On the contrary, it struck me that my father must be acting in a very self-sacrificing manner, for it must be exceedingly painful to be publicly associated with a tragedy, no matter how noble one's motives may be.

But another idea also occurred to me.

"Father," I faltered, "what about Mr. O'Connell's wonderful diamonds? Have they been stolen, too?"

The effect of this question was enough to frighten me from ever addressing another to my father. He reeled as if I had struck him, and positively gasped for breath, glaring the while at me with eyes which shone fiercely out of a lividly pale face.

"Wonderful diamonds?" he gasped, staggering towards me with so threatening a mien that I involuntarily retreated until the closed door prevented me from going any further. "What are you talking about? And why do you connect Mr. O'Connell with diamonds?"

"Because," I answered, "there is every reason to do so. Yesterday Lady Windelmore and I called at a jeweller's in Bond Street, and saw a most wonderful suite of diamond ornaments, intended for the Empress of Russia. We were told that only royalty or millionaires could afford that kind of thing, and that Mr. Emil O'Connell had ordered an identically similar set to be made. He paid for it, and fetched it away yesterday afternoon. He was coming here last night for my final answer to his proposal, and it seems only natural to suppose that even if he brought no other of the costly gems with him, he would at least bring the diamond half hoop, on the chance of its being needed."

Mrs. Sherwood was still too much agitated to join in the conversation, but she looked eagerly at me as I spoke, and I remember thinking it odd that, though she had been crying violently for about twenty minutes, her eyes were not in the least red, like mine would have been.

"This is news to me," was my father's gravely spoken response. "I had no idea that O'Connell had anything valuable on him. Of course, he would not, in any case, have brought more than the ring with him. And even that would not be alluded to in face of the emphatic way in which I declined to accept him as your husband. But the mere mention of that treasure will be enough to ruin us all for ever."

"Ruin us? Father, how can that be possible?"

"It is not merely possible, but certain. Unless it transpires that Mr. O'Connell's diamond suite is safe in his own room, or in the care of the hotel manager, it will be inferred by the world at large that he brought them here, and that we are responsible for their disappearance and the death of their owner."

This view of the case was a very dreadful one. But my father overruled all my objections to it, and succeeded in convincing me that, for all our sakes, it was vitally important to say nothing at present about the priceless gems of which Mr. O'Connell had been the purchaser.

"But what about Lady Windelmore?" I asked. "She heard just as much as I did."

"Did she also know that Mr. O'Connell was to receive his answer last night?"

"Oh, no! I didn't mention a word about it to her."

"Then she will not imagine that he had anything valuable here with him, and I trust to you to enlighten her no further."

Under the circumstances, I willingly promised to be discreet, and my father, having apparently regained possession of his nerves, soon afterwards hurried off to set the police on the track of the cabman, but not before I had asked him one more question.

"Father," I said, "what was the number of the cab? If you can tell that, there will be to difficulty about finding the driver."

A slight pause preceded the reply given to me.

"I never thought about the number. It is a thousand pities that I didn't notice it. But it would only have entered my head to do so if I had been suspicious of the cabman's *bonâ-fides*."

Another moment and my father was gone. Then Mrs. Sherwood, who had again been indulging in a display of emotion, recovered sufficiently to level a sneer at me.

"You ought to be a detective," she said aggressively. "Nothing seems to upset you. And you forget all womanly regret at the loss of a friend of the family in your anxiety to show how easy it would be to fix suspicion on the most innocent people in the world. Faugh! I've no patience with such an unnatural daughter!"

There was no time, even if there had been inclination, to reply to this undeserved tirade, for the speaker flounced out of the room as she said it, leaving me to wonder whether she was entirely wrong or not when she accused me of being unnaturally anxious to disclose incriminating facts. Nor could I entirely exonerate myself, for did there not linger in my mind the lurking conviction that my father had been as careful to avoid telling the whole truth as I had myself?

I could not be sure whether there was a number on the cab or not. But I knew there was no mistake in supposing that I had heard my father say more to the cabman than it seemed necessary for him to say.

"'I'm afraid the gentleman has had a glass too much. He lives at the Cecil. Here's your fare.'"

Those were the words that he had addressed to the cabman. But what could be the meaning of what he added, in a lower voice:

"'Lose no time. You'll find all serene at the office'?"

I would fain have gone back to my own room for the rest of the day, but was unable to do so, owing to various social engagements which it was necessary to keep. By this time I quite understood that the rule of fashionable life which commands most obedience is the one which enjoins us to hide all our troubles and our perplexities behind a smile. The smile may be either amiable, satirical, or arrogant, but so long as it forms a mask which covers all deeper emotions, it finds a welcome which is denied to sorrow.

It must also be accompanied by a corresponding lack of interest in other people's worries, and it appears to be the essence of bad taste to either court pity or bestow it.

This being thoroughly realised by me, I was apparently as gay and as careless as anybody while Lady Windelmore and I paid a visit to the Academy. Mrs. Sherwood was to have gone with us, but excused herself on the plea of a sudden

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attack of neuralgia, and though I have no desire to see anybody suffer from neuralgia, I must confess that I was glad to be spared the infliction of her presence.

There is an idea among some people that the Academy is visited for the sake of the pictures. But very few people, comparatively speaking, would go to look at the pictures if nobody else were there. Anyhow, her ladyship and I only called in on this particular morning on the chance of her meeting some friends of hers whom she wanted me to know.

That which we hoped for duly happened. Mr. Greatham and his sister were here, and I took such an immediate fancy to them that I invited them both to lunch with us. Such slight objections as were raised by Clarissa Greatham were promptly overruled by Lady Windelmore, who smilingly informed her that Mr. D'Alton's *chef* was above being surprised by an inrush of unexpected guests.

She and I were about the same age, but she was as *petite* and dainty as I was tall and vigorous. In fact, we were as as dissimilar as could be Claude Greatham had the same colouring as his sister, but was a well-grown specimen of manhood hailing from New Zealand, where his father, it appeared, had made an enormous fortune by sheep farming. This fortune, on the death of Mr. Greatham, was divided equally between his two children, who, armed with numerous letters of introduction, were now having a good time in London, amongst people whom their parents knew before they sought better luck over the seas.

When we all went back to lunch, we found Mrs. Sherwood looking her usual self, and my father welcomed our new friends in his most genial manner, for he already knew of them by hearsay.

"And you like being in London?" was one of the questions Mrs. Sherwood put beamingly to Claude Greatham, who responded at once:

"Madam, it is a delightful life, though it has its disappointments."

"Disappointments?" echoed Lady Windelmore. "Whatever can there be to disappoint you, who have everything to make you happy?"

"Not quite everything. I have a great friend who has spent many months with us, and who promised faithfully to be the first to welcome us at Southampton if we should visit the old country. He knew exactly when we were coming, and amongst the letters brought on board at Madeira was one in which he enjoined us to be sure and look out for him when the ship entered the home port. But he never came, and we have neither seen nor heard from him, although we have been in England nearly a week."

"The young man is evidently ungrateful, and has no desire to pay for past hospitality," observed my father. But Clarissa Greatham exclaimed confidently:

"Viscount Broomville is no ingrate. The letter which met us at Funchal was as cordial as possible, and I am sure it isn't his fault that nobody knows what has become of him."

"No," added her brother, "that's why I'm uneasy. If it had been anybody else, I wouldn't mind. But Broomville isn't the kind of chap to break his word."

I felt myself growing alternately hot and cold. Hot because Viscount Broomville's name always brought the uncomfortable conviction that I, who already had the choice of several eligible lovers, had given much secret admiration to a man who evidently did not care two straws for me. Cold—because the steadfast confidence of the Greathams re-awoke the fear lest harm had befallen him. I recollected the adventure on the last occasion I had seen him, and I turned pale with a sudden dread lest the "birds of evil omen" had secured their prey after all.

But I resolved to say nothing on the subject to either my father or Mrs. Sherwood, for I knew that neither of them would sympathise with my fears. The Greathams and I would meet at the Countess of Alwinnot's "Small Dance" in the evening, and I would find some means of having a chat with Clarissa about Lord Broomville.

Meanwhile my father, with his usual tact, had ingratiated himself so much with Claude Greatham that I foresaw what would soon happen. He would be asked, or would offer, his advice *re* investments, and I found myself hoping that such a course would not have the same result it had had in the cases of Lord Broomville and Alan Melrose, neither of whom I had seen after business had been satisfactorily arranged by them.

"And you must understand that I want you to make yourselves at home here," smiled my father. "I like nothing better than to have young people about me, and the oftener I see you here, the better will both Vivienne and I like it."

Lady Windelmore seemed very pleased at the favourable impression the children of her former school friend had made, and was saying as much to Mrs. Sherwood, when she suddenly faltered in her speech, turned very pale, and murmured:

"Oh, I feel so faint! Do give me another drink!"

Quick as thought, Mrs. Sherwood pressed a glass to the lips of the fainting woman. But she was already powerless to drink the wine offered her, and, with a shuddering groan, she fell back lifeless!

Instantly all was commotion! My father sent half a dozen servants in different directions, in search of the doctors whose attentions could be of no avail to the poor lady so suddenly stricken low. Mrs. Sherwood went into hysterics, and accidentally knocked into fragments the wineglass from which Lady Windelmore had taken a drink a few minutes before she was taken ill.

Claude Greatham lifted the body gently on to a lounge, and his sister and I, though we were both nearly distracted with the horror brought on by this sudden calamity, did our best to aid respiration.

But our efforts were useless, and we knew only too well what the verdict would be when the first doctor arrived on the scene.

"The case is quite hopeless. The lady has died of syncope, possibly due to unsuspected heart disease."

Thus said the doctor, and I, of course, believed implicitly in this verdict, for how was I to suspect that Lady Windelmore's sudden death was really caused by her accidentally discovering information which might prove dangerous to the security of a gang of hardened criminals?

(*Another instalment of this series next week.*)

BDLO

WHAT WORD DO THESE LETTERS FORM?

The above is one of the sets of letters which those who enter the Great Letter Juggling Competition in *Pearson's Weekly* are asked to solve. In this Competition is offered the sum of

£500 IN CASH PRIZES.

To the first prize winner **£250** will go; to the second, **£100**, and to the third, **£50**; while prizes of **£1** each will be given to the 100 competitors next in order of merit.

This type of competition is most fascinating, and will prove a most agreeable pastime for the long winter evenings.

The current number of *Pearson's Weekly* contains the third coupon, while copies containing the previous two can be had of any newsagent, or the Publisher, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., will forward them post free for 3½d.

Those who wish to enter should dispatch their orders for the copies they require as early as possible.

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THE BLACK SPOT.

The Story of its Regeneration.

THAT particular portion of the parish was the despair of the vicar, the curate, and the inhabitants of the rest of the district. It was a curious condition of things; the parish, as a whole, was a well-to-do one in the south-west of London; the houses were large and were occupied by people who could well afford to maintain a residence of a rental value of £100 a year; yet, in the centre of this comparative luxury and wealth, was an exceedingly poor locality—a sort of mud pool in a field of flowers, inhabited by some of the least respectable persons to be found in any part of any town or city.

"Most Londoners," as the vicar said, "speak of the East End as the part of our great city where poverty and vice are to be found at their worst; but this black spot in our parish, although its poverty may be on a par with that of the East End, can give a start and a beating to the said East End in other ways. I have had the experience of rude, impudent children and disreputable adults in the other side of London, but the conditions here are worse!"

And those who knew the district were able to testify to the accuracy of the statement.

It was to "civilise" this black spot that the curate, the Rev. Edward Whitford, set to work in real earnest and in a manner that was not quite ordinary.

He was a splendid specimen of muscular Christianity; he was a University scholar and athlete, six feet tall, with a firm, determined face (which could, nevertheless, look very pleasing) and a frame that was sufficient indication of the physical power that could be called into action if required. Altogether, both in physique and bearing, the Rev. Edward Whitford was a man to command respect.

He was just the kind of man to take these people in hand; but it was, notwithstanding, a bold move. The only other individual who had attempted any sort of ameliorating work among them was the visiting woman; she had been protected from insult by the fact that she was a woman and that she occasionally brought cast-off garments and other welcome gifts to the inmates of the tenement houses.

"Of course, I cannot accomplish much by myself," said the curate to himself and then to the vicar. "I really want the assistance of a lady or two—one at least!—and of some young men, in order to put my idea into execution!"

The worthy vicar, who devoted his attention to the well-to-do members of his congregation, agreed with him, but that he would not get the assistance; he might have a helper or two for a week, but they would quickly fall away after an experience of the black spot. However, a notice could be read in church to the effect that helpers were wanted for the curate's campaign (without making special reference to sex), and so much was done.

The request met with very little success; two or three rather shallow young ladies, who had the curate himself and not the task in contemplation, volunteered to do something, but they were not precisely to Whitford's liking, so he told them politely that he would keep them in remembrance and assign them a part when he saw one that would be appropriate. A whole week passed; the notice was repeated in the church on the following Sunday. The next evening, Monday, when the curate called on his vicar, the latter had a communication to make.

"Here is an offer of help for you from an unexpected quarter," he remarked with a dubious smile. "Miss Eileen Richards writes to me to say that the work which is about to be undertaken by Mr. Whitford, if her information is correct, is exactly the kind of work in which she will be greatly interested, and she is prepared to assist. Now, Whitford, Miss Richards is a newcomer in this district, but from all I learn about her she is just the kind of woman to be a good helper, if——"

"If?" repeated Whitford encouragingly, seeing that his superior stopped.

"If she consents to work under your directions!" concluded Mr. Winter, with a significant look.

Whitford laughed. "I know the character which public opinion has attributed to her of being an independent, masterful young woman!" he observed. "And that opinion appears to have something in the shape of a solid basis; yet—yet I have an idea that we shall get along! For I propose to accept that offer; Miss Richards is, as you have said, exactly the kind of helper required for work of this kind. She would not be afraid of the dirt, the general lowness of the surroundings, and her air of authority will do a great deal towards moulding the parents as it seems to be doing in the process of reducing the little savages of children to something like order and decency. I am very glad!"

So a meeting was arranged, at which Whitford was to unfold his plans to Miss Eileen Richards.

The lady in question had been head teacher of the local board school for about two months, and in that short period she had made a decided impression on the lawless children whose parents were forced to send them to this educational establishment.

She was between twenty-eight and twenty-nine years of age; tall, with a well-shaped figure and a pretty face.

Some people would have called it a beautiful face, but the adjective "pretty" was a compromise, as there was an opinion that the look of decision upon the features somewhat spoilt the beauty.

Everyone who came in contact with Miss Eileen Richards acknowledged her power over others. She was a "very learned person," according to Mrs. Little, who was given to sarcasm; this description was due to the fact that Miss Richards had gained her B.A. degree at London University with flying colours, and to gain that degree at London is something to be proud of

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Edward Whitford and Miss Richards were well matched in two respects; both were endowed with that grim determination that enables people to carry out a plan in spite of all the obstacles which may arise, and both were in earnest in their desire to improve the condition of those who lived in the black spot.

The meeting at the vicarage between these two newly-made fellow-workers served to show more clearly that something would be accomplished in the low-class locality.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Winter were there, they had practically no part in the discussion, but remained interested listeners. Miss Richards heard the plans of Edward Whitford, made suggestions in a quick, matter-of-fact manner, and declared that they would achieve much before they had finished with the black spot. It could not be said that she showed enthusiasm in the ordinary sense of the word, yet she was enthusiastic, as the others confessed quite readily. In fact, good-natured, simple Mrs. Winter was so impressed with the result of the interview that she let slip a remark as Whitford and Miss Richards left which might have upset all. She intended it only for the ears of her husband, and she had no idea that anyone else heard it; but it was caught by both the new colleagues.

"They are admirably suited to each other; I shouldn't be surprised if——"

That was all they heard. Whitford pretended to ignore it, but Miss Richards, with her usual way of going straight to the point, interrupted him as he was about to wish her good evening.

"Mr. Whitford," she said, looking him squarely in the eyes in the full light of the chemist's shop, "this is a serious business, and we have engaged in it in order to carry it through, and for no other reason. You agree with me? Yes, I thought so! Then we must ignore such idle remarks as that which we have overheard, and others of a less charitable nature which we shall overhear!"

"Precisely!" he replied, with just the trace of a smile. He had come from the University with the fixed purpose of settling in a district in which he could devote himself to the improvement of the lower classes, like many other Oxford men of means, and he had found his chance in an unlooked-for direction; the idea of falling in love was so much outside his scheme that it amused him. "I think," he added, "that it is possible for two persons of opposite sexes to work together without making f——." He checked the impolite word. "I have always been a believer in platonic friendships!" he concluded.

"So have I!" she returned frankly. "We understand one another and we can go on! You will hire the large, covered yard at once, and we will get to work?"

He replied in the affirmative, and they separated.

The first movement in this battle against lawlessness and depravity was to interest the inhabitants in something other than the beershops and the attractions which unscrupulous individuals had provided in sundry underground kitchens—which were nothing less than gambling and betting places.

It was not the intention of Whitford to preach religion, because he would not have been listened to. Provide them with some novel counter-attraction, and gradually inculcate in them a liking for something better than squalor and unhealthy amusements; it was a huge task, this regeneration of the black spot, but the two workers were determined.

The covered yard belonged to a large firm which did a considerable amount of carting; the carts and vans entered this yard, went to a platform at the end, were loaded or unloaded, and went their way again. After seven in the evening this yard was empty, for it was not used for holding the carts at night. There were proper stables elsewhere.

Whitford knew the head of the firm, and he determined to hire the yard two or three evenings each week. He could purchase some collapsible chairs and tables, which could be stowed away easily during the day, and the platform would serve splendidly as a stage for singing or conjuring tricks and what not. Whitford made inquiries immediately of the head of the firm, who responded heartily, and would take no rent.

The chairs and tables were ordered, and an opening date had to be fixed, so that bills and notices could be distributed.

Miss Eileen Richards was sitting in a cosy parlour of the house in which she had rented rooms when Whitford was announced. He looked anxious.

"Sit down," said Miss Richards with refreshing coolness. "You look worried; you have been working too hard at this new idea, perhaps? When do you propose to make a start?"

"That's just it!" declared Whitford enigmatically, as he seated himself. "We are not quite ready for an immediate start, yet—we ought to begin on Monday, and to-day is Friday!"

"And Monday is Bank Holiday!" observed Miss Richards calmly. "That is rather a hard nut to crack! I thought it was your original idea to start on the following Saturday if you could, as then the people would have very little money, and would be glad to have a free entertainment. That would be the thin end of the wedge! On Monday, when they have money, saved for the purpose!" She shook her head slowly and knitted her brows thoughtfully.

"That is right enough," said Whitford, "but circumstances alter cases. The landlord of the 'Black Bull' is becoming enterprising; he has kept his plan quiet, but you can see that it is a counter-move to ours.

"He has arranged for a kind of fair to be held in his yard on Monday evening; there will be roundabouts, shooting galleries, cocoanut pitches, and all sorts of things, and he announces that he will have other attractions in the future! The result of that will be that these people will get a liking for that thing and our efforts will be nullified at the outset, our whole plan ruined!"

Miss Richards looked grave for a while, then her eyes kindled, and her usually pale cheeks had a tinge of colour.

"We must fight it!" she cried. "The opposition nerves me to battle. It is a good thing that this beershop show is not to begin till evening; we must have a rival entertainment to offer!"

"Throw drink into *his* scale, and he will win!" murmured Whitford dejectedly. "Still, we must try! But we are so unprepared!"

"Will the furniture be ready?" asked Miss Richards. "Yes? Then we open on Monday evening! We are not so unprepared as you think! I have made a point of visiting these dwellings, and asking about my scholars. I have called at night, when I could expect to see both parents.

"It has been rough work, but it served two objects, do you see? Now, if you get some bills printed and circulated with our names mentioned, their attention will be attracted. We can get up our programme very soon! See here!"

The next moment they were eagerly discussing some ideas of Miss Richards, and when he left her it was understood that the battle between the rival forces of good and evil would begin on Monday evening in deadly earnest.

Surely there never was such excitement in any one corner of the great Metropolis as there was that Saturday evening in that infamous locality when Whitford's bills were circulated! Everybody was invited to witness the free entertainment to be held in Mackington's yard on the Monday evening; there would be chairs and tables, and the men could smoke, and the women could sit and sew (if they liked) while they

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listened. The yard would be well lighted, extra gas jets having been installed, and everything done to make the audience comfortable. The programme would be announced on Monday afternoon. This last was the outcome of necessity and shrewdness; the programme was only half ready when the bills were printed, for one thing, and for another thing it was well not to show their hands too early, or the landlord of the "Black Bull" might go one better.

As it was, that worthy individual only laughed, and half wished that he could have arranged his show for Saturday and Monday also, but that could not have been done, as the various items of the fair would be busy elsewhere on the Saturday night and during the daylight hours of Monday.

The inhabitants grinned when they saw the handbills, and some threw them aside with a remark that cannot be reproduced in cold print; it would lose some of its warm colour, to use a paradoxical observation. Others, who had felt inclined to do the same, thought differently when they saw that Miss Richards, of the Board School, was in it. "There's summat in it," was the opinion, and they began to talk about it and to look forward with curiosity to the further development of the idea. Miss Eileen Richards had commanded their respect.

"If we could have started on Saturday!" was Whitford's comment. But after a chat with his coadjutor he thought differently. It was better as it was.

Somehow, nobody quite understood why, the free entertainment captivated the thoughts of the district. Men and women, saving their money for the "go-in" on the Bank Holiday evening, caught themselves wondering whether they would spend it then, after all.

Whitford and Miss Richards were busy, and it is doubtful if the young University man went through that Sunday with his thoughts so much on his immediate work as he should have centred them. And then came the Monday morning! People looked for the programme, but it did not appear. They laughed, and yet they felt slightly disappointed. And after dinner on Monday they strolled about waiting for the evening.

The rival entertainments were to begin at six o'clock. Miss Richards and Whitford left their respective lodgings at three and went into the yard.

"We'll put the bill out now," said Whitford with a nervous laugh. "I say, we have the best pitch, you know! People must come this way to get to the 'Black Bull,' and they will see our attraction first!"

"It will be hard work," said Miss Richards with quiet determination, "but I think we shall win!"

He took a glance at her from the corner of his eye as he unrolled the huge poster which he had painted himself; she was one of those who command success!

That poster was hauled outside and affixed to the gate, and within a few minutes there was a crowd round it. The word passed round, others came to look, and the publican sent a bar frequenter to examine and report to him.

Oh, the excitement after five o'clock! Saturday had been an exciting day, but it was nothing to this! Whitford disappeared, but Miss Richards smiled consciously and she went boldly round to many of the houses—those which sheltered the worst of the populace—and invited them to the free entertainment!

At half-past five a curious thing happened. People were strolling towards the "Black Bull," and they meant to stop at Mackington's yard to get a passing view, but when they reached the yard they were electrified with surprise. One half of the gate was open, but the space was filled with the booth of a Punch and Judy show, and Punch was giving a brand new entertainment to all who cared to stop. He stopped every few minutes to invite those outside to walk in and be happy—to walk in if they wanted to see more of him as he wouldn't be able to stop outside long, because those inside would be disappointed.

What is there which attracts more attention from young and old than a Punch and Judy show? A big crowd gradually collected, and the landlord of the "Black Bull" waited with ill-concealed rage for his customers who were not coming!

About fifteen minutes to six Punch popped down suddenly, and Whitford—who was giving the entertainment—whispered to Miss Richards. Punch re-appeared, but the small door in the other half of the big wooden gate was opened and the Board School teacher appeared.

"Won't you come in?" she asked of those who stood nearest. There was nothing of the showman or tout about her; she was plainly dressed, and she spoke in a manner that was at once persuasive and commanding. "Do come in! I'm sure you will like it!"

Some tried to peer in, but a partition had been arranged directly at the back of the gate.

Punch supported her efforts, and the people felt that they could not resist, it was so novel, and their curiosity got the upper hand. Slowly they began to file in. Whitford and Miss Richards were exultant.

Alas! There came diversion in the shape of a small band sent by the owner of the "Black Bull." He had been rendered desperate, and was making a final effort. He was not a bad man, but he thought only of his business, and this endeavour to retrieve the character of the locality appeared to him in a totally different light.

It never occurred to him that it was a desirable thing that the locality should be improved; he saw in this attempt only an effort to reduce his business, started by faddists. The band played a lively air; most of us are partial to lively tunes, so the people stopped going into Mackington's Yard and turned to listen. Then the small band turned and began to march away to the "Black Bull" to a quick march, while a man walked backwards at the rear and shouted out to the inhabitants to "come on!"

There was a conflict of emotions; the crowd began to waver; some marched off with the band, others stood as if they were inclined to follow. Punch redoubled his efforts, and shouted that there was nothing to pay. Miss Richards took a bold course. She pulled the bolts of the closed half of the gate and threw it open.

"All are welcome! Come!" she cried.

The Punch and Judy booth was quickly shifted by some willing young men helpers inside, the partition was removed, and the people saw the well-lighted yard, with warm sacking

Whitford unrolled the bill and shot a glance at Eileen from the corner of his eye.

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on the ground, and with tables and chairs placed in front of a platform on which was a painted scene—and they followed the Punch and Judy booth into the yard.

It was "follow-my-leader" in this, as in most cases, and the crowd surged in. The gate was closed and the entertainment began at once. Only a few went to the "Black Bull."

For nearly three hours Whitford, Miss Richards, and the young men and women who had agreed to act as chorus, kept those rough, coarse inhabitants interested. There were several repetitions of Punch's performance, always new and always entertaining, in spite of its age.

There were songs by Miss Richards, whose voice proved to be of extraordinary sweetness—songs like "Home, Sweet Home," and "Auld Lang Syne," which touched an audience whose homes were none of the best. There were glees by the chorus, duets, recitations, and some rather clever conjuring tricks by Whitford, a violin solo by another helper, and many other "turns."

And at intervals both Whitford and Miss Richards addressed the audience; their remarks had nothing of maudlin sentiment in them, but were bold and vigorous, uttered in tones of earnestness that went home. They were full of sound sense, and the effect was seen in the parish later.

It was early, perhaps, to close, but the two principals were thoroughly fagged, and they hoped that the audience would show enough sense to go straight home. and the majority did so. The victory of the Bank Holiday fight lay with the regenerators.

A proportion of the parishioners were inclined to blame Whitford for "lowering himself so," but he declared that he had done nothing "lowering" in saving people from intemperance and Bank Holiday excesses and brutality. That entertainment was the first of many, and everyone admitted that the black spot was really becoming less black. Whitford and Miss Richards devoted all their leisure to the regeneration, as they called it, but she had more leisure than he during the evenings, and her work became better known among the poor.

It would be interesting to relate in detail the progress of that struggle for the regeneration of the plague spot of the fashionable parish, but it would be rather a series of stories than one short narration. The landlord of the "Black Bull" was only one of the representatives of the enemy; neither Whitford nor Miss Richards had any personal feeling against him, but they believed that it was absolutely necessary to bring about a moderation, at least, of the drink traffic, as well as to effect the abolition of other even less desirable places in the neighbourhood; and Fate had willed it that his stronghold was the first to be attacked. Afterwards, he became friendly with them and arranged his house on a basis that made it more tolerable.

For twelve months the fight was waged with untiring vigour against the causes of degeneration, and there came a day when Whitford and his gallant fellow-worker could feel that they had won, and that the black spot was losing its blackness rapidly. Within a month from that great time there came a revelation.

Whitford called on Miss Richards, and, after a few commonplaces, announced that his work in the parish was at an end. Miss Richards looked up with a start, and her pale face grew a shade paler.

"I think that the completion of our work can be left to other hands," he observed gravely. "I am about to leave here."

"But why?" asked Miss Richards, her lips quivering slightly.

"You know that my recent work has not met with the entire approval of certain persons who are influential here," he said quietly. "They think that I have not properly upheld the dignity of my position, and so forth. I do not care for that opinion, because I feel that I—that we—have done the right thing. But Mr. Winter has now taken their side, and, rather lamely, he has this morning told me that he thinks a change will be beneficial to both him and myself. That intimation came just as I was about to answer in the negative to an offer of the vicarship of a small district in a very poor locality; I had conceived it my duty to renounce the chance of preferment in order to remain here, but Mr. Winter's communication settled the matter for me in a different way, and I wrote an acceptance instead of a refusal."

"You will be greatly missed!" That was all she could say; she was surprised at her own awkwardness, and at the strange, strained tone of her voice.

"Do you think so?" he inquired. And then there was silence.

Neither of the two ventured to glance at the other; each wondered why his or her own feelings were so tumultuous, and silently asked whether the other was similarly agitated; each tried to think that this agitation was due solely to the prospective loss of a friend and fellow-worker, and each felt a kind of inner shock as the words "Platonic friendship" flashed through the brain. Suddenly, Whitford took a firm hold of himself, as it were, and spoke boldly.

"Will *you* be sorry, Miss Richards?" He saw something in her eyes which encouraged him to go on, more boldly. "Will you miss me very much, Eileen? Yes, I think you will! It has come to me as a revelation that—that I want you with me always, Eileen! Has a similar revelation come to you?" He rose and went over to her, leaning over her chair. "Has it, dear?"

Eileen's face flushed rosily; she gave him a quick, upward glance, and dropped her eyes. That glance satisfied him; he bent lower over her and kissed her with a passion that surprised her, and made her very happy.

"We have unconsciously grown to love one another, Eileen, in the midst of our battle together!" he said tenderly. "Some will say that we are another example of the impossibility of Platonic friendship, but I am still a believer in it, although—I must confess it!—*we* made a muddle of it and fell in love."

"I think that, as we work together in the new sphere, we shall be glad that we did make a muddle of the Platonic friendship idea, Edward!" she confessed, with a happy laugh.

One of the most prized of the wedding gifts was a silver-mounted ink-stand, purchased by means of a subscription raised by the people who lived in the now regenerated black spot!

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Smart Youth!

Teacher: "What is the definition of flirtation?" Intelligent Pupil: "It is attention without intention."

Then He Kicked Himself.

George: "You would marry the biggest fool in the world, if he asked you, wouldn't you?" Ethel: "Oh, George, this is so sudden."

A Tribute to Her Judgment.

Ada: "Why should you think that I will ever be willing to marry you?" Jack: "Because I have so high an opinion of your good sense."

Much More Comfortable.

"Maria," said Joseph, as they were going down to dinner, "may I sit on your right hand?" "Why, of course not! You'd better take a chair."

Showed His Sprinting Powers.

Tom: "I asked old Goldman for his daughter last night." Dick: "What luck?" Tom: "Well, it was what you might call a run of luck. I got away."

That Stopped It.

He: "They met at the seaside. Then commenced an acquaintance that would soon have ripened into love. But——" She: "But what?" He: "They married."

Nineteenth Century Sentiment.

Gladys: "How do you like a man to propose?" Gertie: "By post." Gladys: "But that is so prosaic." Gertie: "Prose goes further than poetry in a breach of promise suit."

She Wanted an Explanation.

Jones: "Confound it, it's too bad of you! Didn't I telegraph to you not to bring your mother?" Mrs. Jones: "I know you did, love. That's what she's come to see you about. She read your telegram!"

A Sensible Suggestion.

Softleigh: "I always weah gloves foh the—aw—purpose of keeping my hands soft, dontcherknow." Miss Cutting: "Indeed! And don't you think it would be a good idea to discontinue wearing your hat for a similar reason?"

The Only Time.

"Do you not sometimes have soulful yearnings which you long to convey in words, but cannot?" asked the sentimental girl. "Yes, indeed," replied the young man. "I was once dreadfully anxious to send home for money, but I didn't have the price of a telegram."

No Danger Whatever.

He had risked his life to rescue the fair maid from a watery grave, and, of course, her father was duly grateful. "Young man," he said, "I can never thank you sufficiently for your heroic act. You incurred an awful risk in saving my daughter." "None whatever," replied the amateur life-saver; "I'm already married."

The Reason.

She: "Really, now, aren't you a married man?" He: "No, why!" She: "Oh, you have such a settled look." He: "Yes; I've been refused by thirteen girls."

Spring is Coming!

"I dearly love birds," he gently sighed. And then what did she do but hasten to the open piano and softly begin singing, "I wish I were a bird." They are looking for a nest now.

Accounted for It.

He: "Look at that woman on the other side of the street waving her hands about her head. Is she practising physical culture?" She: "Goodness, no! She's describing her new hat to another woman."

Convincing Signs.

"How still they are," remarked Mrs. Frobb, *apropos* of the young couple in the next room. "Yes," replied Mr. Frobb, "it reminds me of my army days. It was always wonderfully quiet just previous to an engagement."

Just Like a Man.

Husband (irritably): "Can't you remember where I said I left my glasses at breakfast this morning?" Wife: "I'm sorry, dear, I really can't." Husband (peevishly): "That just shows the forgetfulness of you women!"

It Mollified Her.

Young Bride: "Why, Herbert, do you call this little pigeonhole a shoe cupboard?" "My love, that will hold a hundred pairs of shoes of the size you wear." "Well, perhaps you are right. It's neat and handy, anyway."

Diplomatic.

Wife: "Don't you think you might manage to keep house alone for a week while I go off on a visit?" Husband: "I think so. Yes, of course." "But you won't be lonely and miserable?" "Not a bit." "Then I won't go."

Quantity and Quality.

"He throws a kiss to me every morning as he goes by!" "What a waste of good material!" "Oh, dear no, it's not a waste. They're just the superfluous ones that he can't deliver in person owing to the shortness of the evenings."

On the Horns of a Dilemma.

His Sister: "It is true that Helen Goldust has money, but she is so exacting. If you were to marry her you would have to give up smoking and drinking." Her Brother: "If I don't marry her I shall have to give up eating as well."

A Covert Insinuation.

Maud: "Dicky seems to be very timid. He was afraid to kiss me last night." Marie: "I don't think he is timid. He kissed me the other night." Maud (spitefully): "That does not show he isn't timid. He probably was afraid to refuse."

What He Thought.

"With your strong arm about me I fear nothing," she said as she looked searchingly into his eyes. "Phew!" came the voice of the sarcastic small brother who had been peeping in at the door, "you don't take many chances of getting scared so far's I can find out."

A Regretful Pun.

A lady, who was very submissive and modest before marriage, was observed by a friend to use her tongue pretty freely after. "There was a time," he remarked, "when I almost imagined she had no tongue." "Yes," said the husband, with a sigh, "but it's very long since."

Desperation!

Young Wife (at dinner-table, sobbing): "I think you—you—are just as mean as—as—you can be. I made that—that apple-dumpling as a pleasant surprise for you, and—and now—you—want me to bring you a hatchet to cut it in two with." Young Husband: "Good heavens, Maria! Is that a dumpling? I took it for a cocoanut." (With desperate firmness.): "I'll eat it now, Maria, if it kills me!"

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TRUE THROUGH ALL.

Showing How All's Well that Ends Well.

"You fully understand me, Ethel? Unless you do as I wish in this matter, you cannot remain an inmate of this house. I will not have such an example of disobedience set to my own daughters. They are at an age when they may be badly influenced by it, and seriously harmed."

Mr. Stephen Curliss, broker and speculator in general, threw himself back in his chair at the breakfast table, and looked with a frown of dislike on his swarthy face at the delicately beautiful girl who was pouring out his second cup of coffee.

A wealthy widower, with two plain daughters, he had married, in a moment of weakness, the beautiful widow of an acquaintance who had died deeply in debt. His wife retained her good looks, and was, after a fashion, dear to him.

But Ethel, with the face of her dead father, who had been his rival at school and in business alike, had been obnoxious to him from the first. And now that she daily and nightly attracted the attention in Society which he felt that his own daughters ought rightly to receive, his mind was made up to be rid of her at the earliest possible date.

Ethel Vere was proud as well as beautiful. She tried to hide from his notice the wound that his words inflicted.

But her lips trembled, her dark eyes moistened, and it was some moments before she could reply:

"I thanked Mr. Winslow for the honour he had done me," she said at last. "But I told him of my engagement to Frank Hartwell. I think it ungentlemanly of him to renew his proposal, and I cannot accept it."

"Then you must find another home," frowned her step-father. "I am in earnest, Ethel. Winslow is rich; he is a respectable merchant, and he is quite foolish in his fondness for you. I am acting for your own good in urging you to marry him. You will say so yourself ten years hence, if you take my advice. But if you persist in refusing him because you were once engaged to that unfortunate young sailor, who has gone down with his ship, you must take the consequences."

"Say no more!" exclaimed Ethel, brokenly. "I do refuse, I must refuse. Only let me remain here till my mother returns from Yorkshire, and then I will find another home."

"Your mother is quite too ill to be disturbed by this nonsense, Ethel. I wrote to her last week. There is her answer. You must decide this very day. And she will not be here for three weeks to come."

With her mother's letter in her hand, Ethel hurried to her own room. Hot, blinding tears fell over the words which the weak and delicate wife had written by her stern husband's order.

"Since poor Frank is lost to you for ever in this world, do, my dear child, be guided by Mr. Curliss." The last lines ran: "Marry Mr. Winslow, and in the home of wealth which he will give you, you and I may yet see some happy days."

"A home of wealth, and that man its master, and I the wife of another than Frank!" moaned the poor girl in her despair. "Oh, Frank, my darling! How lightly they all speak, and think, and write of your loss, when it has wrapped the whole earth in mourning for my eyes and heart."

She rose and began to make preparations for her departure. She knew that her mother had no power to protect her in a strife between Mr. Curliss and herself, and she would not subject her to the pain of witnessing the misery which she could not lighten or avert.

Within an hour her trunk was packed ready for removal. In a small bag she placed such articles as she would require. She wore her plainest dress and a thick veil. Counting the contents of her purse, she found that she had but a couple of sovereigns in the world.

"But I have my watch and chain, and a well-stocked wardrobe," she thought, mentally reviewing the situation. "I will go at once to London, and I can find some kind of work, no doubt, in a very few days. Anything will be better than to ask Mr. Curliss for money. If I really need any I can write to mamma."

Without bidding farewell to a person under that hostile roof, Ethel left the house.

Mr. Curliss, glancing over his paper by the window, saw her go, noted the little bag, and whistled softly to himself.

Presently came a carrier with an order for Ethel's trunk. Mr. Curliss saw the man himself, tipped him liberally, made a brief explanation, and sent him away without the luggage.

"That will bring my lady back to ask my pardon," he chuckled, returning to his paper.

But the hours went on, till twilight deepened into nightfall, and no Ethel came. Friendless, alone, and well-nigh penniless, she had made her desperate plunge into the great world.

* * * * * * *

It was nearly dusk when Ethel reached London. The lamps were twinkling in long, unending lines throughout the streets when she timidly entered a hotel and asked for a room.

Young, lovely, unprotected, coming on foot and with no luggage, it was little wonder that the "gentlemanly clerk" found that the house was full.

But his wondering stare, and the audible comments of several well-dressed loungers near his desk, sent the hot blood surging to Ethel's cheeks, and hurried her from the place at a speed which soon outstripped several idlers on the pavement, who were tantalised by the glimpse of her fair face as it flashed by.

"What am I to do? Where am I to go?" thought the poor girl, when she had reached a poorer and safer part of the city, where she could pass unmolested among the crowds, who were too much absorbed in their own troubles to have leisure to think of hers.

What a waste, what a desert of houses the great city seemed to her, who there could claim no home!

It was the hour of reunion among the humbler classes, who depend upon the day's earnings for their daily bread.

Fathers were hurrying home from work, and at the house door the good wife met them with a smile, and the little ones drummed eagerly upon the window panes, or ran a race down the narrow passage to claim the first fond kiss.

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Some pale widow passed along, with a little parcel in her hand—the toy or cake which should make amends to her darlings for the long day's absence, spent in work for them.

Over and over again did Ethel, footsore, weary, and heart-sick, see these little domestic revelations of happiness in which she had no share. Each time she witnessed them her heart sank lower and lower.

"In this great city there is a place, a home, a welcome for everyone save me," she thought, blinded by the tears she tried to force back. "And yet if my darling's life had been spared, oh, God! how happy I could have been, even in the humblest of these homes, with Frank!"

One by one the cheery welcomes died away, and the doors and windows were closed on the fireside groups within.

"Perhaps some of these people would be willing to shelter me till morning," thought Ethel who was growing tired and faint from inanition, for she had eaten nothing all that day.

She searched for her purse, intending to ask the question of a meek-faced woman in mourning, who had just passed her.

The purse was gone!

Throwing open her cloak in an agony of horror, to search its inner pocket, she found that her watch and chain had been taken, too!

Where or when she had been robbed she knew not. It was useless to waste thought over that question. She had only to face the terrible fact that she was entirely without resources in a strange city, and to decide upon the course that she was to pursue.

Hunger and fatigue were alike forgotten in the overwhelming shock of this discovery. Some words of prayer fell vaguely from her lips as she turned into a side street that looked darker and narrower than the others.

Ethel fell into Frank's outstretched arms, and fainted away.

But she scarcely knew what she was doing; she only walked on, almost stunned by her appalling situation, till she heard the rippling of water near by, and knew by the cold breeze that blew towards her that she stood upon the river's bank.

By day this place was a busy scene. At nightfall, being lined with warehouses, it was deserted and quiet.

Ethel leant against a railing and looked out upon the dark river with its forest of masts and its twinkling lights.

For one moment a terrible temptation possessed her.

"One plunge, and it will end the trouble," she sighed, leaning over the wharf. "And Frank will never come back. What have I to look forward to—what to hope for—if I live?"

She was young and strong, and the dark mood could not long endure. With a shudder she drew back, and looked up at the dark walls around her with anxious, questioning eyes.

The door of the nearest warehouse opened softly. Two men came out—a third remained at the door—and the flash of a dark lantern was thrown across the girl's figure and face.

"All right. The cab is ready, down below at the corner, and there is the girl. You know what to do," said the man in the doorway.

"All right," replied the other two.

Ethel, frightened, yet scarcely believing that they could be speaking of her, had turned to fly, when the foremost man seized her by the arm.

"Not that way, miss. The gentleman is waiting for you down yonder," he said, trying to speak in a gracious and assuring tone.

"You are mistaken. I am not waiting for anyone. Please let me pass," replied Ethel, white with terror.

"Lood alive, Ben!" said the man in the door, with an oath. "You'll have the cops here next, at this rate."

"That's so," said the second man in the street.

Snatching Ethel from his companion's grasp, he placed one hand over her mouth, and hurried with her to a cab that stood in the shadow at the end of the street.

"I've got her safe and sound," he said, through the window, as soon as they were safely within the carriage. "Run, Ben, and tell him; and stir yourself, my man, for if we are not out of this in five minutes, some of them blessed sailors will come loafing by, and then we may see trouble. Now, missy, do you just keep quiet," he added, in a surly tone, as the poor girl struggled in his arms. "No harm's going to happen to you, if you'll only be still. You may take Jack Chapman's word for that."

The noise of Ben's running feet could plainly be heard by Ethel, mingled with the creaking and swaying of the great ships at anchor alongside the piers.

The sound of sailors singing a rude chorus floated through the air. Then came a voice whose lightest sound would have had the power to awaken her, she often thought, even from the sleep of death.

"No, thanks. You are very kind, but I must find my dear ones at home before I join in any merriment on shore," said the deep, grave tones. "I have been reported lost, you know, for some months past, and one heart, I am very sure, has mourned for me. I'm off at once. When I come back I will gladly accept your invitation—if all is well."

"I hope it may be. Good-night."

"Good-night, captain."

The voice was near. The step—the dear, familiar step was nearer yet.

Putting all her strength into one wild effort, Ethel shook off the rough hand that was laid over her mouth, and screamed:

"Frank! Frank! Save me! I am here!"

"Confound you! *Will* you hold your tongue?" cried her captor, savagely.

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But still she held herself aloof from his grasp, and cried aloud her lover.

The door of the cab was wrenched open.

"Who is calling me? What is wrong? Ethel! Good Heavens, Ethel, how came you here?" cried Frank Hartwell in blank amazement, as Ethel, with a sob of joy and thankfulness, fell into his outstretched arms, and fainted away.

The man, alarmed for his own safety, had opened the opposite door of the carriage and vanished. The messenger, Ben, held himself discreetly aloof in the distance. The horse, the only honest element in the mysterious business, for obvious reasons was unable to explain it. The door of the warehouse to which Ethel pointed when she recovered her senses was fast closed, and no answer was made to the repeated summons of the angry sailor by anyone within.

Nothing could be done, except to conduct Ethel to a respectable and pleasant shelter, under the roof of his widowed aunt, and leave her there until arrangements could be made for a wedding, which came off within a week. For Frank Hartwell, after the ill-luck which had wrecked him with one ship, had found good fortune in another, which picked him up at sea, and conveyed him to China, where in a short time, the foundation of a respectable fortune had been laid by him.

"And being a rich man's wife, my darling, you may go and bid your mother farewell before we sail for the Flowery Land," said Frank. "But never again shall you face the world alone."

* * * * *

It was nearly a month after Ethel's marriage that her husband solved the mystery of her night adventure near the pier.

He was summoned to a private conference one day by the head of the great shipping firm by whom he was employed, and offered the command of one of their finest vessels, then about to make an immediate voyage.

"I owe you this, or, rather, I owe it to your wife, in common gratitude," said the merchant in a low tone. "I know that neither of you have spoken of the events of a certain night, and you must continue to keep silence for my sake. I have a daughter, Hartwell—my only child—and very dear to me. But she is weak, fond of admiration, and with no mother to watch over her.

"Recently, while at school, but how I know not, some rascally foreigner contrived to make her acquaintance. He persuaded her that he was a nobleman in disguise, and the poor, foolish child agreed to meet him near my warehouses on that very night, and to marry him, after which my forgiveness was to be asked.

"By chance your wife happened to be on that very spot just as my daughter, with her maid, who was her confidante neared it. What the two girls saw and heard thoroughly frightened them. My child hurried home, and confessed everything to me, and she is now safe at my country-seat, with her good aunt, who will watch over her hereafter, and teach her better things.

"Through her confession I got at the whole plot, and punished everyone concerned in it. It is now my happy task to reward you for the share you unconsciously had in saving my poor child from a fate that would have been worse than death. You will tell your good wife the story, of course. Then let it be forgotten. And now, Captain Hartwell, let us go and see your ship."

Thus ended Ethel's troubles. In a foreign land, as in her own, she is happy, as a loving heart must be that is true through all.

Would that thus safely and sweetly might close the story of every sad and lonely wanderer upon the city streets!

Margaret Blount.

First Swell (pretending to mistake for an attendant a rival whom he sees standing in dress clothes in the cloak-room of the theatre): "Ah! Have you a programme?" Second Swell (up to snuff): "Thanks, my man, I got one from the other fellow."

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! This is to proclaim and announce to all and sundry that on February 12th of the present year of grace Messrs. C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. will issue the first number of a new magazine, priced at sixpence, entitled The Rapid Review.

Now, it is going to be a magazine which will interest all—which all who wish to be right up-to-date in everything must read, unless (1) They can afford to buy every magazine, review, and periodical published. (2) They can afford to buy every new book published. (3) They can afford to go to every new play. (4) They can afford to go to every new concert. (5) They can find time and patience to read the political accounts in all the papers. (6) They can afford time, money, and trouble to trace through old newspapers, text-books, and maps why nations are quarrelling, where they are quarrelling, and everything connected with the matter.

Unless they can afford to do all these things, then they must buy The Rapid Review. For this new magazine is a monthly review of the world, of its thought and progress in every form of enterprise and advancement, from politics to literature, from the drama to country life and pursuits.

All this it will accomplish by presenting each month the *essentials* of what the best books and brightest brains have given during that period to the world. Obviously, then, above all others, the busy man and busy woman will be the persons directly appealed to by The Rapid Review.

They will buy it, and immediately will have in their hands a brightly-written summary of every event of topical importance. They will read, for example, a concise explanation of the Russo-Japanese crisis, and forthwith will have the whole matter from its cause to its then position at their finger-tips—and will be able to talk about it clearly, intelligently, confidently. If for its treatment of such affairs alone, the busy man will find himself compelled (and, after he has seen the first number, anxious) to buy The Rapid Review.

Imagine the entertainment given, and imagine also the money saved. For, having read this new Review, you will be able to see exactly which magazines will interest you, what new books, new music, and new plays have been brought out. You will find all you want to know about country life and pursuits, science and art, woman's work and interests—about everything, in fact.

So that it is manifestly your duty, and obviously to your advantage, to order at once and buy on February 12th the first number of The Rapid Review.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER (*continued*).
On the Eve of a Discovery.

Edward Day went into the grimy little shop, smelling of old clothes and a paraffin lamp. On the other side of the counter a little, faded-looking woman was seated, examining some article of wearing apparel. At the sight of the aristocratic visitor, she jumped to her feet and curtsied nervously.

"Are you Mrs. Robson?" Edward inquired graciously.

"Yes, sir," she answered, "that's my name. Do you come about selling any wardrobe?" she asked in a timid voice.

Day smiled. The idea tickled him, that anyone should imagine that he had come all the way from Piccadilly to sell his old clothes.

"No. I received your letter about the information you had to impart about the woman who died on the ship coming home from Australia about twenty-five years ago," he said. "I am interested in the case, because I believe there is money in it, and if I find out anything that will throw a light upon the mystery, you will be handsomely paid."

Mrs. Robson leant across the counter, her pale, worn face and scanty grey hair lending her a look of frailty.

"Then you are not the son—or one of them?" she asked slowly.

Edward started. The question was unexpected. He had not calculated upon another waif being cast upon the world's mercy with himself, and he was rather inclined to resent it as an impertinence.

"No, I am not," he returned glibly. "But I fancy I could lay my hands on the son of that woman if I tried, but I wish to be sure that it is worth while telling him about his birth at all. Of course, if the poor woman was simply an unfortunate creature who had no name to speak of, it will be kinder to let the son live and die in ignorance of his antecedents."

"She was no common woman," Mrs. Robson said suddenly. "Although she did go steerage and was in rags, she was a lady every inch, she was, and the little chaps as she was mother of looked fit to live in a palace. I was in the same cabin with her and nursed her, and a softer spoken lady never breathed."

He looked at her closely. It almost appeared that there might, after all, be a story behind his birth, one that it were just as well to find out. But the mention of a brother stuck in his throat. He wanted no one to share his fortune, should there be one; on the other hand, it would be a nuisance to have a hanger-on in the shape of a down-at-heel brother, begging from him!

"You insist on two boys," he said. "What were they like?"

"One as dark as night, sir; black curls on 'is little 'ead, even as an infant; the other one, the younger of the two, was as white as milk—flaxen 'air and blue eyes."

"Well," he said impatiently, "I want to hear whether you have anything to tell me that will help me to unravel this mystery. Did the mother ever say anything that would lead you to believe that her sons had any right to a name at all?"

Mrs. Robson shook her head regretfully. She was living over again the tragedy of that little stuffy cabin

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Dupes of Destiny

(*continued.*)

"As she lay dying, sir, she said a few words that showed there was something on her mind, and she wanted to get it off. I can't remember now what they were, but I know she was very anxious for the certificates of birth to be sent to someone; one word I know, because I thought it so odd coming from the lips of a lady who was travelling steerage."

Edward Day leant over the counter. There was no one in the shop, and he began to experience a strange feeling of excitement in the unravelling of a dead woman's stray words of long ago.

What, if after all, he could hold his head up with the highest; then with his appearance and brains no woman would be too good for him. As for Marcella, she would be at his feet, and he would remind her of her scorn!

"Well," he said sharply. "What word was it?"

The old woman puckered up her brow. "It was 'heir,' sir," she pronounced it 'hair,' but Day knew what she meant, and he was too interested to smile.

"I remember," Mrs. Robson went on, "the poor soul tried to say something. She pointed to the elder baby and said 'the heir—the heir,' and she went on with a lot of talk I couldn't foller."

Edward's breath came in uneven gasps. He had one clue that he was not of ignoble birth! The word "heir," although applied to his elder brother, proved that, and it was not his intention to seek that brother. He sought for himself alone; others must do the same for their chances.

"Did she give any clue to her surname?" he asked with trembling lips. Upon the woman's answer hung a great deal. Once let him hold his own name firmly—the rest would be easy.

"No," Mrs. Robson replied. "She died just before she got more than one quarter the name out. She tried twice, too, and all she said was something that sounded like 'Jer.'"

He bit his lip with vexation. It was too bad to lose just when success had been so near.

"And have you no papers—or even a trinket?" he asked. "After all, you have not told me very much that will be of use, you know."

The woman flushed a dark red colour.

"I know nothing about any papers, sir," she said slowly. "I think that if there were any they were taken by the doctor for the elder boy. But there were two little lockets, just alike, that she had round her wrist on one chain, one was taken off and put round the dark child's neck; the other the doctor gave to me for my services in nursing her."

Edward drew out his pocket book. His eyes were sparkling. The most important clue of all was almost within his reach.

"Well, Mrs. Robson," he said pleasantly. "I am prepared to give you ten pounds for that locket the doctor gave you. It can be of no use to you now, and in working out the mystery of the birth of those boys it will be of great service to me, if you will let me have it. I am sure," he added quietly, seeing her hesitate, "that you would not care to stand in the light of those helpless boys getting their due, and the mother—think how she would feel if she knew that they had been waiting so long for their inheritance!"

Mrs. Robson was silent, then she thought of the ten pounds and how much value it would be to her just now that times were so slack, too! Besides, an old locket was no use to her now. The memory of the dead woman grew fainter as the crisp note crackled under her eyes.

"Yes, I'll see if I can find it, sir," she murmured. "I always kept it in a little box with some things I never use, and bad as business has been in the past, I never once thought of pawning it."

She left the shop, and after some little time returned.

"Here it is, sir; there's a picture of the poor lady inside—leastways, I think it is."

With trembling fingers Edward opened the spring of the tiny locket, and inside saw the face of a young girl looking up at him. She was dark; even the faded photo could not hide that she was beautiful as well. Edward wondered what picture was in the other locket.

"This may help," he said slowly, concealing his glee under a pretence of indifference. "Anyway, I promised you a tenner, and here it is."

He flung the note on the table and, with a careless "Good-night" left the shop, and in a very short time was speeding westward once more, the locket containing the face of his unknown dead mother reposing in the inner pocket of his waistcoat.

He dismissed the cab at Piccadilly Circus, and strolled up towards Park Lane. He was excited and flushed with success.

So far he had done well; now he had to reveal himself as the heir to a good name—and then the ball would be at his feet.

He turned into one of the fashionable restaurants and ordered a bottle of champagne. He could afford it now, for was he not soon to prove himself a man of position and wealth?

The wine went to his head, but did not intoxicate him. He was too braced up by his dreams of the future to be affected by anything he drank, but he grew affable and exchanged a genial "Good-night" with the commissionaire who hailed his hansom.

A girl walking along the pavement turned suddenly at the sound of his voice, and gazed at him with distended eyes until the hansom drew up at the kerb. Then as she saw him about to step in, she darted forward with a choking cry and grasped his arm.

"Edward—stop! my husband!"

With a livid face the man who had arranged his future so brilliantly, turned and saw the white, thin face of the woman he had married, gazing into his own.

Their eyes met, both desperate, both determined not to yield an inch. With an effort of will, conscious that the wondering gaze of strangers was fixed upon the fashionable man and his shabby companion, he beckoned her into the hansom, his white lips forcing a conventional smile for the benefit of the onlookers. She obeyed his gesture silently, the look in his eyes quelling the words she would have spoken.

"Where to, sir?" the cabby inquired, opening the little flap at the top of the hansom.

He hesitated slightly—then said, "Drive along the Embankment, I'll tell you when to stop."

For some time neither spoke. The man was almost frightened of his own awful hatred for the frail, weak creature he had hung round his neck, to find in her an incubus that would drag him down when he wished to rise.

To meet her on the very day when he had clutched at Fortune's robe was an ill omen in itself. She would, in her insensate folly, send his house of cards tumbling at his feet. Her empty, doll-like prettiness, which had long since cloyed upon him, would for ever stand between him and his ambition, unless.—

The hansom trailed down one of the side streets that led off the Strand on to the Embankment, and the keen air from the river fanned his hot forehead, and moved the curls on the woman's brow. The evening was young, a few flickering lights standing pale against the grey of the sky twinkled on either side of the river with a monotonous regularity that irritated him.

He turned to her sharply: "Well, what does this mean?"

His tone stung her to retort. "That I intend to take my place by your side as your legal wife. I've been neglected long enough, but now it's my turn!" She laughed, a nervous, shrill note that jarred on his sensitive ears.

He looked out of the hansom without speaking. He could not trust himself to say a word. His mind was in a turmoil of hate and disgust.

"My legal wife!" and his voice sounded to himself rasping, as though something had broken in it. "You are very sure that you *are* my wife, aren't you?"

She flushed. "Yes, I am—and to-morrow your aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox, of Grosvenor Place, shall know it took

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He started and bit his lips savagely. The breeze tossed the lace round her neck, and the soft whiteness of it filled him with a longing to hold that throat until the taunting voice was still! Then he laughed at himself; that would be to place his own neck in a worse peril!

"Yes, I have met and talked to Lady Violet," she went on calmly. "She did not know who I was, but asked me to the house to see her. Unless I understand to-night that I am to be recognised by you—I shall go to-morrow."

He did not answer. The blood was coursing through his veins like quicksilver. The lights on the river dazzled his eyes.

The river!

For a moment he fancied he must faint, so intense was the throbbing in his brain.

He turned to her suddenly and slipped his arm round her waist.

"Come, we will get out and walk."

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

The Price of Silence.

It was long after midnight when Edward Day returned to the house of the financier, Caleb J. Johnson. He let himself in with the latchkey, and went to the study he had left earlier in the afternoon. He had a vague sense of having lived years since he had gone from the financier's study to visit the old clothes woman in the Walworth Road. Everything was the same—everything wore the old familiar aspect—save himself. He alone had changed, a distance seemed to have arisen between himself and the usual objects of ordinary life—a distance that made him feel lonely in spite of the luxury round him.

He laughed uneasily as he flung himself into a chair near the financier's desk.

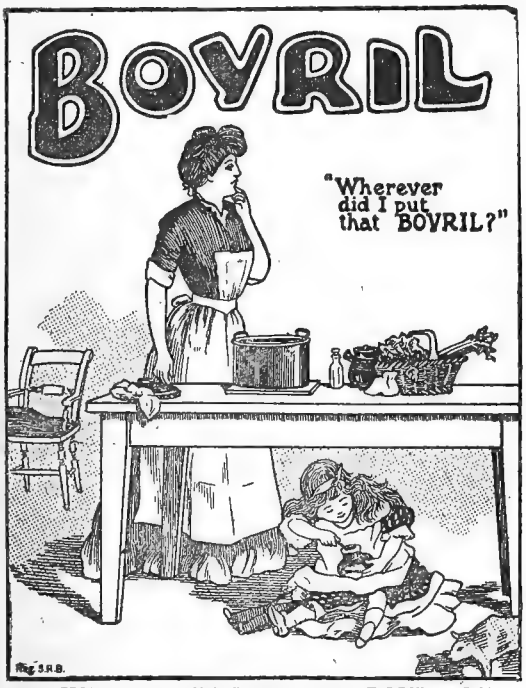
"Bah, what a fool I am!" he muttered. "My nerves seem to have become rotten all of a sudden. I suppose I am over-tired and done up—that's it. I've crowded too much into the twelve hours since I got up. I'll have a peg—that will put some life into me—revive the fainting spirit." He poured out a glass of whisky and gulped it in its neat state with one long sigh of relief.

"Ah, there's nothing like a little stimulant to pull one together!" he muttered. "I feel a different man at once!"

He paused suddenly and bit his lip. He had caught a glimpse of himself in the glass over the mantel, and what he saw reflected there undid the little good the whisky had worked. His face was pale—that greenish, livid tint between white and a more ghastly hue, and in the handsome blue eyes that stared back at him there was a strained, desperate expression like unto the look of a man who had forced himself to gaze upon a fearsome object. His fair hair was disordered, and clung to his brow in damp little wisps, and above the weak mouth there was a long scratch, that looked like a thin red line, and gave his face a sinister expression.

His usually smart appearance had also deteriorated, the glazed collar was bent and limp, the tie awry, and two buttons were missing off the top of his coat as though it had been suddenly wrenched from the button-holes. His cuffs also had suffered with the rest of his attire.

But the expression of fear and horror on his face was intensified as his eyes travelled slowly from his collar downwards. Across one sleeve of his black coat something sparkled dimly under the flare of the electric globes, something yellow that contrasted vividly with the sombre hue of the black sleeve. He put up his hand, and with clenched teeth and trembling fingers picked up the yellow, thread-like object. It was a hair, a long, silky, golden hair, that had twined itself round his arm—something so pretty, so delicate and infinitesimal, that it seemed almost incredible for the sight of it to have sent the blood ebbing from the man's face. He dropped it carefully into the blazing fire, then examined the coat closely



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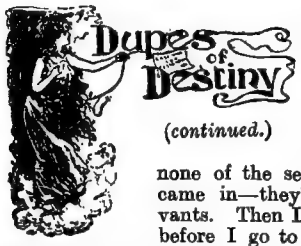

(continued.)

in search of others. But there were none, and with a deep-drawn breath he staggered to the door.

"It will be just as well if I change these things and get into a lounge suit," he muttered. "I'm glad none of the servants were about when I came in—they're inquisitive beings, servants. Then I can attend to these letters before I go to bed; a long spell of work will take my thoughts off myself—and"—he shivered—"they are not very cheerful ones to-night."

He left the room and went to his own quarters, and presently returned, looking the same as he generally did—well-groomed, nonchalant and supercilious, but his eyes alone remained strained, fierce, and burning. He could wash his face, smooth back the fair hair, and change into immaculate linen, but he could not alter his eyes. The windows of his soul could not be taken out and replaced. They were beyond his reach, and he could not force them to his will.

He sat down at the financier's desk and lit a cigarette, then turned over the papers carefully. He was a clever business man, and the fascination of the City was upon him—the smell of gold in his nostrils. He touched the many mining prospectuses that the financier had left in his hands as women touch children—tenderly and with light fingers. His alert brain was busy; he had many things to work out—and none of them could be approached until he had mastered the first, which was the conquest of gold, the lust of power!

Caleb J. Johnson had left his secretary his power of attorney, upon which to act in an emergency, and he had made himself fully acquainted with the contents of the financier's prospectuses, and the letter books that contained copies of the vast correspondence such things entailed.

As he looked steadily on through the pile of letters that had been brought over from the Dovermarle Hotel in the financier's absence, a sudden peal of the bell, that echoed through the silent house with an eerie vibration, stayed the pen in his hand, and sent the blood throbbing to his head.

He sprang to his feet, dropping the half-burnt cigarette on to the thick rug, where it smouldered among the fur, and it was not until the dazed man became conscious of the smell of burning that he put his foot out and ground it beneath his heel. He drew his hand across his brow—it was wet with perspiration.

"Who can that be?" he muttered. "Surely not old Johnson—he would not come at an hour like this! Why, it must be nearly two o'clock!"

He opened the door and went out into the hall. All was in darkness, but coming down the stairs was a manservant, looking half asleep, and carrying a candle in his hand. Day went forward quickly. "It may be someone for me, Robert. I will go and see, but you had better wait here in case you should have to receive some message. It is probably a wire."

He went to the door and drew the latch quietly. His pulses were quivering with the strain he had put upon his self-control, and beads of moisture trickled down his neck.

He opened the door just as there sounded another peal at the bell. On the step a man was standing, his face was in darkness, but Edward Day could see that he was big and square of frame.

"Well," he said sharply, "what do you want? This is a nice hour of the morning to knock people up. Have you come with a message?"

"I have come on important and urgent business," was the answer in a not unpleasant voice. "I wish to speak with a gentleman who lives in this house. His name is, I believe, 'Edward'—his surname I cannot remember."

Edward Day looked at him intently, but the pitch black of the sky hid the man's face.

"I think you must be mistaken, for——" he began curtly, when the stranger cut him short

"No, I'm not—an Edward someone lives in this house, because I saw him enter it with my own eyes. He came in about one!"

A sharp exclamation escaped Day. This man had come to see him, and, what was more, he intended to. Perhaps it was the better policy to admit him. He need not acknowledge that he was the "Edward" in question. After all, he was some begging letter sort of chap, who had discovered that he was the secretary to the rich financier. Anyway, he would see him in case—in case he was not a begging fellow.

"I will see you and hear what your urgent message is," he said, "and when you tell me I will judge whether it is worth my while putting you in touch with the gentleman you desire to see."

A dry smile puckered the mouth of the silent intruder, who followed the secretary along the dark hall to the study of the financier. The manservant was still yawning his head off, wondering how much longer he would have to wait. Edward turned to him suddenly. "It's all right, Robert, only an urgent message I must attend to for Mr. Johnson."

When the study door had closed, Edward turned and looked at the man who had dared to intrude at such an unearthly hour. He saw a man with the appearance of a Colonial in his breezy self-possession. He was also of great physical strength, with a bull-dog type of face, humorous eyes, and a loose, insolent mouth, which broke into a wide grin as he caught the secretary's eye.

"You haven't asked me to be seated, so I will take a chair near the fire," the stranger said in a pleasant tone. "It's no treat to be waiting about in the cold this weather."

"Then allow me to suggest that you are entirely to blame for waiting," Edward said sarcastically, suppressing his inclination to kick his unbidden guest out of the house. "Surely your news cannot be of so interesting a nature that you could not have deferred it until a more conventional hour? You had better be quick, my man. I am busy, as you see, and not inclined to waste my time. Besides," he added sharply, "the gentleman you wish to see will not care to be disturbed at this hour."

"No," laughed the man with the humorous eyes. "I can quite believe that. He has had a busy day—a very busy day."

Something in the tone of his voice sent a cold, sickly fear into Edward Day's heart. He turned abruptly, and for a moment looked as though he would have fallen on the man who sat watching him with a slow, amused smile.

Then he pulled himself together, and said hoarsely: "Well, out with it, what do you want to say? Only don't take too long—that's all."

The stranger leant forward, and said in a low, cautious voice:

"No, I won't take up more of your time than I can help, Mr. Edward. Oh," he laughed, "don't fancy I am making a mistake, my friend—I know you a little more than you know me."

"I'm not surprised," Edward retorted, seeing that disguise was useless. "Beggars like yourself make a point of knowing the people from whom they hope to extort money. But let me tell you, my man," he sneered, "unless you make short work of your message to-night, I shall kick you out of the place, and give you in custody for begging."

"Really," laughed the stranger genially, "I am half inclined to let you put your threat into execution. It would be the most amusing experience I have ever had!" He ceased laughing, and a sudden cold menace crept into his voice as he continued slowly: "See here, Mr. Edward, I'm no beggar—though I'm quite ready to acknowledge myself a scamp when in the society of a——" He stopped, and the eyes of the two men met in a flash of understanding.

Edward Day reeled against the table, and a low cry of baffled rage and fear rose to his lips, but at the sight of the other man's steady smile of power, he checked it, and said with a hoarse laugh:

"I begin to understand now. That's it, is it? Well, you want what?"

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"When I followed you," the stranger said slowly, "I was not prepared to do anything but satisfy my natural curiosity about a man with such a—a talent as you seemed to possess for disposing of, shall we call it—obstacles? But when I saw that you resided in a mansion in the heart of the West-end, I concluded that it was my duty to myself to make a suitable allowance for my old age by selling my silence to you!"

Day turned a livid face to him. "Stop that joking!" he snarled savagely, "and come to the point. What's your price?"

The other looked at him thoughtfully. "We'll say two £2,000 to begin with."

The financier's secretary and future man of wealth sprang to his feet with a rasping laugh. "Are you a madman? Such a sum is as far beyond me as the stars! You may think yourself lucky if you get a fiver—and, remember, there is such a thing as protection from blackmail," he blustered.

"Then you know your remedy," the other returned calmly. "I am quite prepared to face the penalty, if you are! For blackmail I should probably get seven to fourteen years; you——" He paused, and his humorous eyes sparkled with amusement. "I am afraid after all I can take no less than the two thou," he finished blandly.

Edward Day turned to the desk and moved some papers about aimlessly.

His brain, recovered from the first shock of knowing that his secret was no longer confined to himself, began to think rapidly. He had no intention of going under, even in the face of such odds. No, he must pay this man somehow, by hook or by crook.

Afterwards he might think out a way of getting clear of his clutches. Suddenly he paused, and his eyes, haggard and bloodshot as they were, brightened with a new inspiration. The financier had trusted him with his power of attorney—he was a rich man, and his money was at the service of the secretary, as Mr. Johnson had left a few bank-notes to the value of some hundreds in his hands, with which to meet emergencies, should occasion arise.

He opened the secret drawer in the back of the desk, and drew them out, then paused; with them was a cheque-book of the financier's. Perhaps it would be wiser to sign a cheque—the financier's signature was an easy one to copy; he had done so lately very frequently in signing letters, and had marvelled at his own cleverness. Why not settle with the blackmailer in this way? Caleb J. Johnson would not suspect him of a fraud, and even if he did, he could deny all knowledge of a cheque-book being in the desk. He turned to the stranger, who was looking at him curiously.

"I suppose it is hopeless telling you that I cannot give £2,000?" he asked curtly.

"Quite," was the laconic reply. "Either that or——"

With a muttered imprecation Edward Day bent over the financier's cheque-book and filled in a cheque for £2,000, then signed the name of "Caleb J. Johnson," just as that gentleman himself would have done.

Edward Day had a taste for imitating other people's signatures.

"What name am I to make it payable to?" he asked curtly.

The stranger hesitated, then said slowly: "To J. Rayne, and leave it open and uncrossed. I have not the luck to have a banking account—just yet!"

"There you are," and Edward flung the cheque across the table. He was quite cool, all signs of hesitancy and fear had gone from his manner. "I shall give no more," he said curtly. "Do what you like—this is all you can get from me."

Mr. Rayne looked at the signature curiously. "Caleb J Johnson" conveyed no meaning to him, but evidently the man he had shadowed to such good effect was a golden goose whom it would be wisdom not to kill. He folded the cheque and put it in his pocket, then rose.

"I will go now," he said, "but you will probably hear

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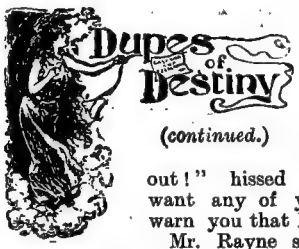

(*continued.*)

from me soon. I shall not lose sight of you, Mr. Johnson; to-night — or rather last night—has been a lucky one for me, and perhaps for you," he added significantly.

"Confound you, get out!" hissed the secretary. "I don't want any of your congratulations, and I warn you that I shall give no more."

Mr. Rayne smiled. "There's plenty of time to think of that," he said, "but you will find it difficult to get away from me, Mr. Johnson. Will you show me to the door—or shall I go myself?"

Silently Edward Day ushered him out, and shut the door on him with a savage bang.

"It's awful," he muttered, as he flung himself by the desk again. "Here is a far worse incubus hanging on to me now, and one that I shall not easily shake off! How is it to end—how am I to fight it out?"

Then he stooped and picked up some papers—a packet of letters that had fallen from the secret drawer in the financier's desk. He opened them absently. They were old and had apparently been tied up a long time. Then after a few minutes he sat up and began to read earnestly.

In the meantime Mr. Rayne was chuckling to himself as he walked along the deserted streets. "Two thou! Not bad! I'm glad I happened to see that little episode near the river. Now I'll go and see what is happening down there? By this time all ought to be well. I shall be a rich man yet; Jerningham's money, and now this young Johnson's. He must never find out the truth of to-night."

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man with the Beard Again.

When Philip Nullius, disguised as the "Vicar" at Water Grange, reached the village, he risked being traced to his rooms by the men who were naturally incensed at having let him slip through their fingers, and were probably searching high and low for him. So it behoved him to be very careful and, as far as was possible, to avoid being seen by anyone in the beaten way.

His mind was occupied with many things. It had seemed almost incredible at first that anyone should desire to deprive him of his liberty, even temporarily, and after the first flush of anger, he knew that there was a greater reason behind it than the signing of a paper promising to relinquish all claim to the hand of Marcella Rust, that had actuated the extreme measures of Sir Cyprian's tools. But why should the baronet have taken such a keen dislike to him?

He wondered what mystery was at the back of his hatred? It was almost as though he hated him for some reason beyond that of having won the love of Marcella!

His lips relaxed into a tender smile. Marcella! His guiding star and own true love. They had dared to ask him to sign a paper that would lose him for ever the right to call her his. Then the sudden memory of that lie they had flung at him—the lie that had caused his face to flush and his heart to throb with anger—Marcella engaged to her cousin, Edward Day! No, he could laugh at such falsehoods when the vision of Marcella's beautiful pale face rose before him. Such a man as Edward Day could never win the love of a girl like Marcella, let alone keep it, and Philip glowed with a warm thrill as he knew that he—and he alone—was the man who had been blessed with the inestimable boon of her love.

It was dark when he reached the house from which he had been taken by the specious stranger with the shifty eyes. Remembering his disguise, and also fearful that some of the "enemy" might be lying in wait, he did not reveal himself to the landlady when she opened the door, but since he required the papers that had been left behind, and which were valuable to him on account of being the only links with his unknown past—he was obliged to run some risk in speaking to her.

"I—I have called for some papers that belonged to Mr. Nullius," he said, in a low, husky voice. "They are important to him."

The woman stared in amazement. "Well now, sir, that's a strange thing," she said, "a gentleman called 'ere about an hour ago with the very same question. I showed 'im into the room, and some time after 'e rushed out of the 'ouse like one mad."

Philip staggered back with surprise. Who could have taken sufficient interest in those letters, of a dead unknown mother to have read them? There were tender little notes which he had received from Marcella, too. Then all must have been seen.

"Have you the papers now?" he asked quickly. "I will take them with me, if so."

She shook her head. "The gentleman took them, sir—every one. I looked into the room afterwards."

Gone! Then the man from Water Grange had called again! "Was he the same gentleman who—who called for Mr. Nullius last night?" he asked, expecting an answer in the affirmative.

"No, sir, 'e was what I should call a toff," she said; "'e 'ad a diamond ring on 'is little finger."

More mystified than ever Philip murmured some apologetic speech, and moved away. Who was the man with the diamond ring? he wondered. He had an indistinct recollection of having once seen a man with such a ring on his little finger—but who, he could not think. He only knew that none of the men he had seen at Water Grange had worn a diamond ring. But he had no time to waste on further inquiries. He wanted to get away, to think and plan out his further movements. It was one advantage that he knew where to locate his enemies, and from whom to expect the next blow; but he resolved, with a tightening of his muscles, that forewarned was forearmed, and the next attempt—should there be one—would find him well equipped. He caught an up train to London, and, arriving there, put up at a hotel for that night, and the next day waited until dusk fell, and then sent a telegram to the Vicar of the parish Church at Crawley, which he couched in the following words:

"*Kindly grant extension of absence—most important—writing fully.*—Philip Nullius."

He waited in the telegraph office for the reply. In about an hour and a quarter's time it arrived:

"*Certainly—take two weeks.*—Preston."

He left the office thoughtfully, and paused, wondering as to his next move. It was quite dark, and the heavy coat he was wearing, together with the soft slouch hat, and the disguise in which the kindly girl at Water Grange had got him up, utterly changed his appearance and made his mind easy on the score of detection.

As he stood irresolute, two voices, coming from a couple of men close by, made him wheel suddenly round and stare at them. One was a tall, dark man with inky black beard and hair, and long, white hands, which he *used* frequently. His companion was not so tall, and Philip instantly recognised the man Boulter who had called for him in the trap to take him to Water Grange.

Very quietly he drew near to them, one at least he knew only too well, but it was the man with the black beard who puzzled him.

There was something vaguely familiar in those white, soft fingers, but he was speaking in such a low undertone, that though he went as near as prudence would admit, Philip could not make out what he was saying.

"It's not my fault, anyway," grumbled the man Boulter. "He knocked me down, and when the 'Vicar' went to my help, he got out of the room and turned the key. Then when we got out there was no trace of him anywhere, though he only got off in a dressing-gown."

"Fools—the whole lot of you," muttered the man with the

(Continued on page 223.)

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ON THE WELL-INFORMED WOMAN.

The majority of her less up-to-date sisters envy the well-informed woman, and they do so with reason—she is never at a loss for conversation, no matter what society she may be in—that is the whole secret of the matter. She can talk with women on all that interests women, and she can express an intelligent opinion on those many matters of topical interest which appeal, particularly, perhaps, to men. Her husband, coming home from business, finds no desire to go out to his club for the discussion of this or that important question—his wife is there to delight him with her ready grasp of the chief points of the matter. Decidedly, the well-informed woman is a woman to be envied.

And yet the acquisition of knowledge, desirable though it is, is one rather difficult of attainment. Politics are interesting when it comes to a government being thrown out; international quarrelling is interesting when it comes to war—but all the events which lead up to these crises make, as a rule, but dry reading. And so the average woman "skips" the long, dry newspaper reports, and, consequently, when the climax comes—knows nothing about it, and bitterly regrets the fact.

On the 12th of this month such a state of affairs is going to be no longer possible!

On that day there will appear the first number of a new monthly periodical, entitled The Rapid Review.

On its cover you will see a picture of the world with, written across it, the magazine's title—The Rapid Review. And this is exactly symbolical of its contents and scope. It is a monthly review of the world—of its thought and progress—and it is a rapid review. Political matters, foreign affairs, Parliamentary doings—all these are full of interest when treated in the right way—in the way in which they will be treated by The Rapid Review.

Yes, and that is only one point. Do not imagine that The Rapid Review is going to be simply a political magazine—far from it; it is going to treat interestingly much lighter matters.

Every month, for example, when you have read The Rapid Review you will have read *all* the reviews, *all* the magazines, *all* the periodicals. For it will contain extracts from all the most interesting articles of the month—extracts which will be full of entertainment in themselves, and which will have the further advantage of helping you to buy just the magazines which you know will interest you, and of preventing you from wasting your money on those which will not.

And it will be just the same with the latest books, the latest plays, the latest music. The Rapid Review will be a guide-book to all these things, and a guide-book very nearly as interesting as the originals themselves. In fact, very often it will be more interesting, for it will give you the best parts of everything—the kernal of the nut, without the shell.

Nor is this by any means all; for now we come to yet another feature which clinches the matter. No woman who wishes to keep in touch with the thought and progress, the doings and the sayings of her sisters all the world over, can possibly afford to miss The Rapid Review.

Turn, when you buy your first copy, to the feature under the heading "Woman's Work and Interests." There you will find bright and brief *résumés* of all the work and progress accomplished by women during the past month. Extracts from their writings, their speeches, and their lectures; reviews of their meetings, their employment, their sports—in fact, of all their interests.

So that, whether a woman cares to take an interest in the weightier matters of current interest or not, she will at least find in The Rapid Review very many other features which are bound to interest her.

And so, let us in conclusion put forward a definition: What is a well-informed woman?—The woman who reads The Rapid Review.

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(continued.)

black beard in a louder key. "Now I must begin again. With that man loose, my own liberty and all I enjoy are in jeopardy. I came down here with Winter the moment your wire reached me. To fail like that in a little thing is infernally annoying to say the least."

"We were not to blame if you let us get hold of a young tiger for strenght," growled the other man. "The Vicar thought a clergyman would be as easy to manage as a kitten."

"Instead of which he found you as easy as kittens," sneered the other voice. "Well, he will now be on his guard and more difficult to trap—but trapped he must be. Is there a traitor among you lot at Water Grange?" he asked sharply.

"Only the 'Vicar's' girl. She's left to-day, though, to get work in London!" was the reply.

"Ah!" breathed the man with the black beard. "That's it, his handsome face has got round her, and she helped him to get off! The 'Vicar's' a fool for keeping her there!"

"If the 'Vicar' thought Lottie had betrayed him he would kill her," Boulter said savagely.

"It's too late to lock the stable door when the horse is stolen," snarled his companion. "Anyway, I shall be in town some days myself, and will watch for him. He will not return immediately to his curacy, but there is one house he may visit to get news of Marcella Rust. I will meet him there, I know." He laughed softly. "In the meantime be careful to notify me what happens—within a short time something is bound to be known. And, remember, you cannot be too careful. They have not dropped the search for the instigator of the 'Mona Lisa' deal. Leave no trail behind you that can be picked up, and be sure to stick to the signal, the sign of the"—here his voice was lowered again, and Philip was left in a maze of doubt and wonder as to who this black-bearded stranger could be, whose enmity he seemed to have also aroused.

They moved away, and he followed at a safe distance, then they parted—the man with the beard getting into a passing hansom, the other going on foot. Philip gazed after the hansom thoughtfully, until it was lost in the maze of traffic, then he started. He had reached the kerb where the bearded man had stopped the hansom, on the ground was a little piece of twisted paper. He stooped and picked it up curiously. It was a telegram; the part with the address was torn off, but the message was intact: "Bird flown—cage empty—no trace—send message in cipher.—Vicar."

"Phew!" Philip murmured, "so the 'Vicar' was waiting for orders, was he? I am glad I have seen his worthy colleague—I know a little of their movements. What's this?"—his foot had touched something on the ground, where he had seen the piece of paper. It was a coin of some sort. He looked at it closely in the dim light; it was strange that no one should have noticed the man with the beard drop it when he got into the hansom. As he looked he uttered an exclamation of surprise. The coin in his hand was a spade guinea!

"By Jove! What an odd sort of coin to be dropped at one's feet!" he muttered—then laughed. "It may bring me a slice of luck. I will throw it in the air and if it comes down with the shield up, I will chance everything and go to Marcella, in spite of her father's bitter enmity!" He threw the coin lightly in the air and caught it quickly. The shield was uppermost. Notwithstanding his disbelief in anything that depended on chance, he felt glad, in a happy, boyish way, that it had fallen as he had hoped.

"So be it!" he murmured. "I will go to-night. I shall find some means of seeing you, my darling love!"

He went back to his hotel, and there changed into his normal dress, putting the wig, eyebrows, beard, and moustache into his pocket. He felt that, once in the train, there would be no necessity for disguise until he left it, and no one would think of watching for him at Paddington; he knew that from what the bearded man had said. He took his ticket and was making for the refreshment room, when a slight touch on his arm roused him to a sudden regret that he had not kept up his disguise. He turned sharply to see a tall, beautifully-dressed woman standing beside him. Her face reminded him in a way of Marcella, and he looked at her with interest.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely, "did you wish to speak to me?"

She inclined her head, and then, speaking in a low, cautious voice, said: "You are Mr. Nullius—are you not?"

"I am," he answered slowly, wondering whether she were not also a decoy of the unknown enemy.

She saw the distrust in his eyes and coloured warmly.

"You have a right to suspect everyone, Mr. Nullius," she said softly, "but your distrust will go when I tell you that I am Marcella's aunt, Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox!" She had paused at her surname, remembering the new name she had had bestowed upon her by the millionaire, Caleb J. Johnson.

Philip's face brightened. "Lady Violet!" he exclaimed "How did you know me? I did not think you had ever seen me!"

"I saw you some time ago," she said quickly, then went on: "I came to the station to meet someone, and recognised you at once. How did you get away—tell me—was there danger?" she whispered anxiously.

He looked at her in surprise. How had Lady Violet Frayne-Lennox learnt that he had been lured to a den of rogues! She saw the expression on his face and said gently: "I guessed that you were in danger, Mr. Nullius, and found out, for Marcella's sake, where you were. I cannot tell you how I found out," she added, "but something told me that you were in danger—and—and I sent a—a friend to find you. Did anyone see you who came from me?" she said anxiously.

Philip shook his head. "No one seemed to be possessed with a great desire to help me," he said grimly, "with the exception of one person—but I am well out of it now, Lady Violet, and though I can't understand why I should be the object of so much attention, I fancy I shall not be annoyed again. I am going to Marcella."

"Going to Marcella," she echoed—her eyes flaming with a sudden light. "Thank God, Mr. Nullius, that you are! I hoped it was so, but waited until you mentioned it yourself. Promise me," she continued in a low, hurried whisper, "that, come what may, you will stay near Marcella always—don't be turned away; she wants you—your protection and love, more now than at any other period of her life. The danger that menaces Marcella is in the Court." She removed her hand from his arm, where she had placed it in her eagerness. "Good-bye, Mr. Nullius," she finished. "If you have any disguise, wear it. Don't go half way to meet danger; it is very near you now!"

She turned and moved away as abruptly as she had spoken to him, and as he took his seat in a first-class carriage, Philip found himself pondering over the words Lady Violet had breathed so earnestly into his ear. Danger at the Court! Danger for his beloved Marcella! Surely Sir Cyprian—then he paused, a man of Sir Cyprian's character would stick at nothing. He must be careful for Marcella's sake—he must not meet her father at the Court.

A sudden impulse caused him to lean out of the window of his carriage before the train started. He had quickly resumed his disguise, so feared no chance eye spotting him. On the platform he saw Lady Violet, and with her was a tall man, and as he saw the man more clearly, Philip gave an involuntary cry of amazement.

The man talking to Marcella's aunt was the same bearded stranger he had seen earlier in the evening with the man Boulter, and who had dropped a spade guinea on the pavement!

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

"Natty" Men and Marriage.

"Do natty men make good husbands?" asks "PERPLEXED." "My young man is the neatest, tidiest man I ever knew, particularly about his personal appearance and dress. I should almost call him 'finicking.' I love him very dearly, but am rather afraid this quality of his may make him a tiresome husband."

* * * * *

I don't very much care for the "natty" man myself. From the wife's point of view, though, he should be pleasing, as he is unlikely to cause her extra work by untidiness, and may perhaps help her very much in keeping the house as it should be. But, in my experience, I find that "nattiness" does not, as a rule, last very long after marriage. Though a man may take no end of trouble about himself when he alone is in charge of matters, when he finds that there is a wife handy to do things, quite likely he falls off very considerably. In a year or two he may lose all that "finicking" way of his. How often is it that the neatest, sprucest single man becomes untidy and careless after marriage. So I do not think "PERPLEXED" and her beloved need think of separating on this trivial score, for things will probably turn out all right in the end.

Dressmaking and Married Life.

"SOPHIE" writes: "I am a business girl, and engaged to a clerk with a small salary. When we marry, would you advise me to help matters by taking in dressmaking—at which I am rather clever? I have asked other people about this, but they advise me not to, as they think it would interfere with my other household duties, and also, later on, with my care for any children we may have. I should very much like to know your opinion on the subject."

* * * * *

I should think your husband-to-be would be the best judge of the matter. If his means are really very slender, then what you might earn would perhaps help you both a great deal. Of course, it is quite true that dressmaking does interfere with a woman's home duties. If unable to keep a servant, too, she would soon find that the strain of housekeeping as well as dressmaking would break down her health. It would certainly interfere with her care of children. So, "SOPHIE" had better decide the matter with her *fiancé*. In any case, it is a very good thing to have such an accomplishment as dressmaking, if the family should in future be in any financial trouble. It would always keep the wolf from the door, if ever there should arise a case of urgent necessity.

Propose or Postpone?

"Q." sails for South America very shortly. While in Britain, he has, he thinks, fallen in love with a girl. He is not quite sure of feelings, but thinks if he knew her longer he would certainly be devoted to her, and she to him. Would I advise him, under the circumstances, to propose before going abroad, or to postpone it until he returns, say, two years hence. By that time he expects to have an assured business position, which he has not at present.

* * * * *

I advise "Q." not to propose. He is not, he says, sure of either his own or the girl's feelings, and to bind himself and her to an engagement during his two years' absence, would be unfair to both of them. Let him wait until he returns, though it is two years from now.

Two Eighteen-Year-Olds.

"Is a man in love if he does not, after fourteen months' courtship, take his sweetheart home to meet his family?" "ANXIOUS" asks this question, as her lover, while always talking of his love and their marriage, has not yet introduced her to his people. They are both eighteen.

* * * * *

He may quite possibly be very much in love. But a youth of eighteen might, quite naturally, be reluctant to take his sweetheart home. While I hope you will both continue to love each other, you are very young to talk of an engagement, and no doubt the reason he has not taken you home is that either his people are ignorant of your courtship, or opposed to it. Wait until you are both a little older before you think about marriage. When you are in a position to think of it, no doubt he will introduce you to his people.

The Casual Acquaintance.

"I TRAVELLED from Plymouth the other day," writes "W. E.," "and in the same carriage met a very charming young lady. I made some passing remark about opening the window, and as a result we got into conversation. By the time we reached our destination, we seemed to know all about each other, and to be very good friends. Now, what I wish to know is: Ought I to endeavour to resume her acquaintance? Or would that be resented by her as taking advantage of her? By-the-way, though she gave me no address or name, I think I could easily trace her again."

* * * * *

If the girl did not give you her name and address, and in any way hint that she wished to resume your acquaintance, of course it is not for you to make overtures. At the same time, if you think you could find her, it would not be a bad idea to try to meet her again by accident. Such things have been done by ardent lovers, times out of number. By-the-way, I happened to know some years ago of a similar case. The man was travelling in the same carriage as a girl, and they got very friendly. The man knew that he could not ask the girl her name and address outright, but he somehow managed to get it by other means. The girl was reading a certain book. The man, on seeing it, pretended that it was the one book he wished to read. At the end of the journey, the girl promised to lend it to him—giving her name and address for its return. When he sent the book back, he wrote a little note, which the girl answered. A correspondence sprung up, which led to meetings, and not a very great time elapsed before the two became engaged.

Cynthia

Printed by HORACE COX, Bream's Buildings, London, E.C., and published by C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD., Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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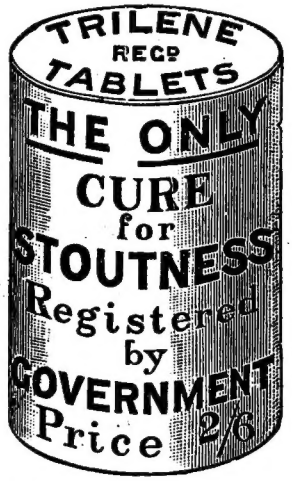

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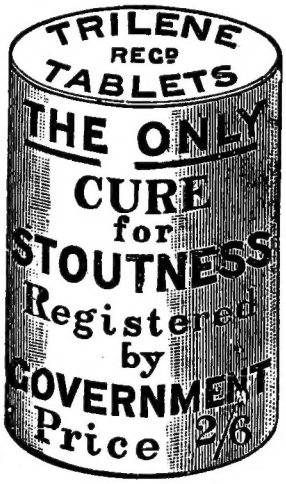

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. B. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. McLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 29 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st. and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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